



ARK THE LEGEND

BOOK 01

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Ark the Legend

(아크 더 레전드)

by

Yoo Seong

Synopsis

A new game which the nation has dived into.

From the bloody battlefields to the pyramids of ancient times, head into the colourful world of Galaxian.

The glorious days of the legendary gamer Ark is over.

From finding a job to saving the party from a humiliating death, nothing is easily solved.....

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Prologue

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“Is this the interview location?”

A 20 year old male asked while pushing up his glasses. In Seoul Gangnam, it was a building located 5 minutes away from the train station. A black glass in front of the building flashed ‘Global access Korea’ in English. It was the sign of a large company so the man naturally hesitated. He didn’t have the courage to go in. But he also didn’t have the courage to return.

He took a deep breath and entered the building.

“I’ve come for an interview.”

“Please go to the 3rd floor.”

The model like receptionist pointed towards the elevator.

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

He nodded and hurriedly walked forward and he heard laughter from behind him. His face turned red. He could guess the reason why she was laughing. He had suddenly received the notification for an interview so he had borrowed a suit from a friend bigger than him. The suit didn’t fit his figure so he looked quite unseemly. Of course, he didn’t have any hope even after receiving the notification for an interview.....

“Director-nim is coming!”

A guard’s voice rang out and the lobby instantly became busy.

The guides stood up while the guards lined up in front of the door. The man pushed up his glasses and looked confused by the atmosphere. One man was just entering through the front door. The man was surprisingly wearing baggy jeans and a jumper. He was in his mid-20's? He was so young yet he received the title of Director. He had probably become the director because he was a 2nd generation heir to the conglomerate. They were similar ages but one person got a position in the company from his parents while the other one had to borrow some clothes for an interview. The young man once again despaired about the identity gap in modern society and was about to turn away when he suddenly flinched.

“Wait? No, that person....p-perhaps.....”

The young man's mouth gaped open as he examined the face of the other man. The Director's eyes then looked at the young man. The Director looked at the badge on his chest and smiled.

“You came for an interview?”

“Huh? Yes, that's right!”

The young man replied with a rigid stance. The Director was about to say something else when the guards approached.

“Director-nim, Vice President-nim wants to see you straight away.”

“Vice President-nim? Understood.”

The Director nodded and was about to turn around when he looked at the young man.

“Don’t be too nervous. You will get good results if you try your best.”

“Thank you!”

The young man’s voice rang out through the lobby. The Director smiled and moved away while the young man asked a security guard.

“Director-nim.....is he? The famous.....”

“You already know?”

“Of course! I am a user in New World so it is impossible for me not to understand!”

“Yes, Kim Hyun-woo. He is the legendary gamer who became a director of Global Exos, Ark.”

The guard answered as he watched Hyun-woo go up the executive exclusive elevator.

Space 1: The Name is Ark

SPACE 1. The Name is Ark

‘I was also like that.....’

Hyun-woo recalled the old days. It had already been 4 years since Hyun-woo set foot in Global Exos wearing borrowed clothes like that young man. But now he became the advisor director and could get on the exclusive elevator to go straight to the vice president’s office. The difference after 4 years was huge! This meteoric rise was because he was the representative of Global Exos in New World. No, to be precise it was because he obtained the master code after defeating the Dark Lord Lucifer. The master code was what Park Woo-seong and Yuna used to create New World so he literally gained the power of the Creator. The master code ended up being absorbed by Hyun-woo and stuck to Ark’s character.

How could a mere user like Hyun-woo receive such a thing? It would take 10 days just to explain the eventful 3 months it took. This was the result so he had to accept it. In the autobiography ‘Ark,’ it stated that he survived on seaweed rolls as his meal three times a day while playing the game and had become the best user in New World.

‘Anyway.....’

Since then, Hyun-woo’s life had changed by 180 degrees. The reason why Hyun-woo first started New World was different from other users. He wanted to achieve two things through New World.

The first was to get a job at Global Exos and the second was to gain enough money for his mother's medical bills and their living expenses. He accomplished both things with the master code. In the view of the game company, it was impossible to leave Hyun-woo who had the power of the master code alone. They decided it was necessary to manage Hyun-woo and gave him the title of Advisory Director.

Even if he graduated from the large S or K universities, it would be difficult to cross the threshold to reach the title of Advisory Director. His life had reversed by playing the game!

‘When comparing to 4 years ago when I had to worry about the meals every day, there is nothing more I can wish for but.....’

It was the law of the world that he would lose something when gaining too much. Hyun-woo lost ‘Ark’ after he became the Advisory Director of Global Exos. He didn't mean that the character Ark had died. Ark swallowed the master code and had gained the unique position of God in New World.

God!

Yes, Ark wasn't a simple character in New World anymore. With the power of God, he could handle anything in the game world! It was a power that every gamer wanted. However, actually gaining the power was different. Think about it. If he had the power of God then he could delete a terrible moment or he could easily find legendary armour. No, level and equipment had no meaning.

“Huck! The trap worked!”

“There is a mob of monsters! The numbers are terrible!”

“Ugh, I can’t give up now!”

It was a desperate moment in the game!

“.....Del.”

-Good job! You have wiped out thousands of monsters in one blow!

This happened with just one word from Hyun-woo. The Del key could destroy thousands of monsters in one blow. That was the power of the master code. Why would level of equipment matter? It was the same even if Lucifer was revived again. If he said ‘Kill’ then Lucifer would be smashed to death! Hyun-woo could no longer call New World a game. That didn’t mean Hyun-woo had nothing to do in New World. New World was a game so it was continuously developing new contents. Park Woo-seong was the creator and main person behind the ‘Lucifer incident’ (see autobiography of Ark) had been arrested. Therefore Global Exos had a new task team to develop new content but they failed to reach the level of the genius Park Woo-seong. Every time they updated with a new expansion pack, a serious bug would occur. For example, a devil would suddenly appear to wipe out a novice village. Hyun-woo’s main task as the director was to correct these bugs. Hyun-woo could easily use the master code to move the devil to the middle of nowhere.

‘It is a form of work but.....’

He no longer felt exhilaration when exploring a new dungeon or tension when meeting a powerful enemy. It was good becoming a God at first but after being invincible for the last year, his passion for New World gradually faded away.

Ark was a God, not a game character anymore. The time where Ark cried over 1 copper wouldn't return. He sometimes felt despondent when thinking about it but Hyun-woo shook his head.

‘It sounds like I’m complaining after having a full stomach.’

He got everything that he dreamt about 4 years ago. He shouldn't be excessively greedy. At this time, Hyun-woo never imagined what would happen. Hyun-woo didn't know what was waiting for him in the Vice President's room.....

Dding-!

The elevator stopped.

‘.....What?’

Hyun-woo looked surprised. When he entered the Vice President's office, four people were sitting down. He knew the faces of three of them. The one with a bald head was the Vice President who called him and the man in his thirties next to him was Ha Myung-woo from the Planning Department. The problem was the other person.

‘If I remember correctly, he is Park Woo-seong!’

The real creator of New World! Park Woo-seong had been charged after the Lucifer event. Hyun-woo heard the consequences weren't small because it was quite a large event. So why was he sitting in the Vice President's office of Global Exos? Hyun-woo hesitated and the Vice President stood up.

“Ah, Director Kim, come on in.”

The Vice President introduced him to the other middle aged man in the room.

“This is Kim Hyun-woo who is known as Ark in New World.”

“Nice to meet you. I am Moon Ji-hun.”

“Yes, I am Kim Hyun-woo.”

Hyun-woo greeted and looked at the Vice President. The Vice President sighed heavily and said.

“He is someone from the government.”

“The government? Why is someone from the government.....?”

“Please sit down. Chief Moon will tell you the details.”

Hyun-woo sat down across from Moon Ji-hun and stared at him. It was an attitude commonly seen in people wary of the government. But he didn't say anything since Moon Ji-hun seemed serious. Hyun-woo was 100% sensible. He noticed the atmosphere and intuitively sensed that what he had to hear was important. Not surprisingly, Moon Ji-hun's starting words were extremely stressful.

“I wanted to point out one thing before telling you the details. I am the current chief of the department of the Emergency Planning services. And that is the reason why I'm here today. From now on, everything I have to say is confidential. You cannot say anything about it outside this room, no matter the reason. This is a matter of national security so you will be severely punished if you break this.”

‘Emergency Planning? National security?’

He had only heard those words in the news. Hyun-woo was stunned by the unexpected words but that was just the beginning. The following words that emerged from Moon Ji-hun's mouth was something that he hadn't even heard in the news.

“Around 4 p.m. yesterday, all the nuclear power plants in this country have been occupied by a terrorist.”

“Eh? Eh eh? The nuclear power plants have been occupied by a terrorist?”

“That's right.”

“B-but I didn't hear about it on the news.....”

Hyun-woo stuttered with a disbelieving expression.

“If it was discovered that the nuclear power plants were shut down.....”

“You're very perceptive.”

Moon Ji-hun nodded.

“You'll probably understand even if I don't tell you. Currently the only people who know the details are the task force from the Emergency Planning department and the managers of the power plants. Together there are approximately 100 people who know.”

Hyun-woo was stunned. What type of place was the nuclear power plant? It contained nuclear power. If a problem occurred at a nuclear power plant then it was the same as receiving damage from a nuclear bomb. Yet Moon Ji-hun said that such as dangerous place was occupied by terrorists. That in itself wasn't the only thing that made Hyun-woo puzzled.

He couldn't understand why they would talk about it with him.

“W-why are you telling me this?”

“We need Hyun woo ssi's help.”

The answer was even more incomprehensible. Hyun-woo was certainly different from the general public. But that power was only limited to the virtual reality game called New World. In reality Hyun-woo was just an ordinary man.

“My help? Are you mistaking me with somebody else? I'm not a person who would be involved in such things. I'm just a gamer. I'm a person who shuts myself in my house and plays a game.”

“I know.”

“If you know then why.....?”

“You must be very puzzled. It is understandable. I would also be puzzled if I was in your situation. However, we desperately need Hyun-woo ssi's help.”

“No, I mean I'm just.....”

“A gamer.”

Moon Ji-hun continued talking.

“But you're not a mediocre gamer. You defeated numerous competitors in the game New World and gained the abilities like a god. It is the reason why I visited Hyun-woo ssi.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Moon Ji-hun paused after hearing Hyun-woo's question and took out a cigarette. The Vice President was a non-smoker so he looked

uncomfortably at the smoke.

“Have you heard of the game Galaxian?”

.....He had heard of it. Before the advent of virtual reality games, the company ‘Successful Future’ had occupied 50% of the game market. And this was a virtual reality game that they invested 10 years into making. It was the reason why Global Exos continued with the updates despite the bugs. It was to prepare for the fluctuations in the virtual reality game market when Galaxian was released.

“The requirements from the terrorist involves Galaxian.”

“Huh? The terrorists want a share in a virtual reality game that is going to be released soon?”

“It would be better if that was the case.

Moon Ji-hun sighed.

“The terrorist wants to become the number 1 user in the game Galaxian that is soon to be released. His goal is to become the best user in Galaxian, just like Hyun-woo is in New World. If another user takes the position of first place then he would stop all attacks against government facilities.”

“What if the terrorist achieves his aim of coming first?”

“.....In the worst case scenario, the nuclear power plants will be blown up.”

“Eh? Eh eh?”

Hyun-woo’s mouth dropped open. The nuclear power plants would be blown up. Hyun-woo knew the horrible results that

would occur. The nuclear accident involving the Fukushima area in Japan had caused serious damage to Japan and the world. Yet the Japanese politicians still hadn't apologized for it.....

Anyway, decades had passed since there was a nuclear reactor accident so it would cause huge damage domestically and abroad. If someone blew up the nuclear power plants then the damage would be incomparable to the Fukushima accident.

It would be astronomical damage several times that accident! Korea would also suffer from an economic downturn. But the terrorist's demand was the most outrageous part.

‘If other users can't stop him then the nuclear power plants will explode?’

This was the first time he heard of a terrorist like this. He couldn't take it seriously. But this person came from the Emergency Planning department so it couldn't be a joke. It was difficult to believe but it was true. Then the reason Moon Ji-hun visited Hyun-woo.....

“Now you can understand the seriousness of the situation. The Emergency Planning Department was summoned yesterday and after a long meeting, we decided to entrust it to experts.”

“Experts?”

“Gamers.”

Moon Ji-hun said to Hyun-woo.

“The Emergency Planning Department isn't only meeting with Hyun-woo. New World, Royal Road, Mecca, etc. From all the virtual reality games, we asked for help from 50 gamers who stood

out in the game. There is a higher possibility of a user who is already the best in their game reaching the number 1 position in Galaxian before the terrorist.”

That was the reason why Moon Ji-hun visited Hyun-woo this morning. Hyun-woo was the strongest user in the virtual reality game New World. He understood up to here. He understood but.....

“I still don’t understand. Why on earth is the terrorist doing such a thing? If he wanted to compete with other users they couldn’t he just play the game? Why would he need to bother with the nuclear power plants? Furthermore, to become the strongest user in a new virtual reality game? How long would that take? I don’t understand why the country would enlist help from gamers because of one terrorist.”

“Yes, it doesn’t make sense.”

He received a disappointing answer.

“We still don’t understand everything yet. But it is clear that the terrorist possesses the power to threaten the government. And....the terrorist’s ultimate goal is to reach the top position in Galaxian and time has no meaning to him. That....is because he isn’t a person.”

“H-he isn’t a person?”

“.....Do you remember the Lucifer project?”

Hyun-woo looked towards Park Woo-seong sitting near him. Project Lucifer was the name of the artificial intelligence that Park Woo-seong created in order to destroy New World. Hyun-woo (Ark) had defeated him. Moon Ji-hun continued talking while

Hyun-woo looked at Park Woo-seong.

“The terrorist that took over the nuclear power plant is Lucifer.”

Hyun-woo naturally couldn't understand what they meant for a while.

“Lucifer? After that incident.....”

“Officially, he has been disposed of.”

“Officially?”

“The government interfered.”

Ha Myung-woo who had been sitting quietly suddenly cut in. Moon Ji-hun sent him an uncomfortable look but Ha Myung-woo ignored him and continued.

“It's natural for you not to know since it was even hidden from Global Exos. When Lucifer was sealed up and Park Woo-seong charged, Lucifer's data was submitted to the government as evidence. But Lucifer wasn't returned. He also wasn't disposed of.”

“.....Why?”

“Lucifer is currently the best performing artificial intelligence. The government desired it so they took him. They thought they could handle the enormous data of the most powerful artificial intelligence. By using it.....”

“Ha Myung-woo ssi!”

Moon Ji-Hoon shouted. The Vice President who was opening the window for ventilation jumped with surprise. But Ha Myung-woo didn't even lift an eyebrow.

“You became an advisor of Global Exos because you sealed up

Lucifer. You have to right to know all the information related to Lucifer. It will also help with your future work. Isn't that right?"

"Uh....."

Moon Ji-hun just kept on sucking his cigarette. Ha Myung-woo accepted that as unspoken permission.

"The government probably intended to develop artificial intelligence using Lucifer. They thought it wouldn't be difficult if they had Park Woo-seong who created Lucifer. However, Park Woo-seong didn't cooperate with them. But the government didn't give up and ended up retrofitting Lucifer and made a mistake."

"A mistake?"

"The government unleashed Lucifer on a controlled internet network as a test measure."

It was a closed circuit where they were able to 100% control Lucifer. The government thought he was a child that listened to them. However, the government had forgotten an important fact. Lucifer was an artificial intelligence with the ability to think for himself and he is cunning. Lucifer followed the control of the government until he was shut in the closed circuit. Everything changed the moment he connected to the internet network. Lucifer who had been upgraded quickly got past the government's security and hijacked the nuclear power plant. This is the reason why the government can't come up with any countermeasures and are afraid. The computer program occupied the nuclear power plant system so there is nothing for the anti-terrorism special forces to do.

‘That is the reason why the government didn’t decline Lucifer’s request.’

The control systems of the nuclear power plants had the best security. These days the modern smartphones could be more powerful than a nuclear bomb. Lucifer was a smart guy and obeyed the government at first. And the government was hit on the back of the head. Thanks to that, the government was really scrambling!

This was the result of their greed. Hyun-woo might have many complaints about the current government but this was still a national crisis. He couldn’t be glad after thinking about the potential colossal damage. And there was still an unsolved mystery remaining.

“Then what is Lucifer’s purpose? Why is he doing such a thing?”

“Lucifer only had one purpose from the beginning.”

Park Woo-seong started talking for the first time.

“Lucifer is an artificial intelligence. He might think and act like a human but he has no interest in the things humans enjoy. Lucifer doesn’t care about money, power and honour. His purpose if the one I created him for.”

“The purpose you created Lucifer for?”

“Revenge on the users.”

Park Woo-seong laughed and replied.

“However, Lucifer couldn’t accomplish his purpose and was sealed up. So he is going to start again to get revenge on the users.

That is the only way he can be himself.”

“Then why is he trying to blow up the nuclear power plants?”

“Lucifer’s revenge target are the users not humans. Taking human life has no meaning to Lucifer. The nuclear power plant was just a method to escape from the government and to make them leave him alone while he connects to Galaxian. Lucifer can only prove himself if a world where he can compete equally with the users. He wants to prove that he is superior to the users.”

“Then what is he going to do if he proves himself?”

“I don’t know. I only made Lucifer for that purpose. I have nothing to do with anything else. No, his goal might’ve increased by one more thing.”

Park Woo-seong turned his gaze towards Hyun-woo.

“To beat the user who defeated him. That is you, Ark.”

“It is also why I visited Hyun-woo ssi.”

Moon Ji-hun sighed and handed him a note after hearing Park Woo-seong’s words.

Ark definitely has to participate in Galaxian. If Ark participates then I hand over the controls for the nuclear power plant.

Hyun-woo stared at the memo with dumb surprise. The NPC had been defeated 1 year ago and he took South Korea hostage to apply for another challenge. He couldn’t get a grasp of it in order to accept. But it was already meaningless whether Hyun-woo accepted the challenge. He had no choice. It was because of one part of Lucifer’s message.

“He won’t blow up the nuclear power plant if I participate.....does that mean I can prevent a nuclear explosion just by playing Galaxian?”

“It is just a temporary measure.”

“Temporary measure?”

“The current government can’t stop Lucifer because he is the most powerful artificial intelligence. Lucifer said that he wouldn’t commit terrorism if another user becomes the strongest in Galaxian. In other words, Lucifer will just commit another act of terrorism if he wins.”

That’s the reason why Park Woo-seong was here. Park Woo-seong was going to cooperate with the government to prepare a plan to stop Lucifer’s terrorism. The problem was they didn’t know how long it would take. So they needed to request the help of influential gamers like Hyun-woo to catch Lucifer in Galaxian. They had to find ways to neutralize or eliminate Lucifer.

‘.....I have no choice.’

If Hyun-woo refused then the nuclear power plants would explode. But if Hyun-woo connected to Galaxian then he could stop the explosion at least. It all depended on who became the stronger player in Galaxian first. The burden on his shoulder was heavy because it was a national emergency. But reaching the top spot in Galaxian didn’t matter to Hyun-woo. The government had also contacted the strongest users of other games. They also wouldn’t be able to decline.

Because a mere gamer couldn’t antagonize the government. In

addition, there were a large number of other users.

If one of them became the strongest person in Galaxian first than Lucifer's terrorism wouldn't occur. Even if Lucifer became the strongest, Park Woo-seong would've prepared a plan to stop him. There was no need for Hyun-woo to carry the heavy load alone.

‘But even so.....’

This was happening in the first place because of the government's greed. They were just dumping the messy situation on Hyun-woo and the other gamers. But Hyun-woo was still a citizen of Korea. There was no way he could ignore it if there was a chance that the nuclear power plants would explode. But.....

“I understand. I don't know if I can stop Lucifer but I will participate.”

“Thank you.”

Moon Ji-hun nodded and bowed. Hyun-woo laughed as he looked at the crown of Moon Ji-hun's head.

“Then let's start the negotiations.”

.....Hyun-woo was Ark. Free labour wasn't a concept that existed for Ark.

“This will be a difficult situation for me.”

Hyun-woo smiled and muttered. The explosive crisis of the nuclear power plant! A national crisis! An emergency! Moon Ji-hun thought Hyun-woo would be burning with patriotism and would plunge straight into Galaxian.....he was mistaken.

Of course Hyun-woo didn't want the nuclear power plants to

explode. Patriotism also burned inside him. He was willing to do his best to stop Lucifer for the country. Even so, it was impossible for Hyun-woo to work for free. The politicians were the ones who caused this situation so they should pay for it. Why should Hyun-woo have to pay taxes to them and helping clean up their mess for nothing?

‘Anyway, I’ve grasped the sword hilt!’

Moon Ji-hun had already met with other users of virtual reality games and secured their cooperation. Of course, Hyun-woo also had to cooperate. However, Hyun-woo was in a different position from them. Lucifer threatened to blow up the power plants if Hyun-woo didn’t enter the game. In other words, if Hyun-woo didn’t play then they would have no chance to compete with Lucifer. And the nuclear power plants would explode! Not one single mark would be left. If Hyun-woo had some requests then the government would have no choice but to accept. The range of the nuclear blast would be absurd! The government wouldn’t dare risk it! He hadn’t earned the title of strongest user in New World by doing nothing.

“I have three requirements.”

Hyun-woo began to talk with a relaxed expression. Moon Ji-hun couldn’t hide his confusion at the unexpected deployment. He looked at Ha Myung-woo and the Vice President for help but they just looked into the distance. Ha Myung-woo was originally a cynical person regarding the government and the Vice President was fed up with Moon Ji-hun smoking. They also couldn’t afford to offend Hyun-woo who held the master code to New World. Ha

Myung-woo and the Vice President were completely behind Hyun-woo! Moo Ji-hun eventually had to lift the white flag.

“P-please continue.”

“First I have a question. Did you say that Lucifer showed you the requirements a short time ago? So it is possible to communicate with Lucifer?”

“That’s correct. It is possible to communicate through the nuclear power plant control system.”

“Then there will be no problems. My first request is to deliver a message to Lucifer.”

“Lucifer? What do you want to say?”

Hyun-woo emphasized every word in his speech.

“I won’t be threatened by your threat. The dog who was stepped on during the war is trying to bark again. So I’m going to diligently step on you as time passes.....tell him that.”

Hyun-woo agreed but he didn’t like the situation right now. He didn’t mind playing Galaxian. Hyun-woo hadn’t been able to enjoy New World since he obtained the master code. He was the best player in the game but he couldn’t enjoy it. So this was like an opportunity for Hyun-woo. He didn’t have to worry about Global Exos and could concentrate on a game. But he was forced to do it. Hyun-woo was offended that he was threatened to play Galaxian by an artificial intelligence. Ark’s pride didn’t allow him to be dragged into a game by an artificial intelligence. If he had to do it then it was through his own will!

Hyun-woo’s, no Ark’s beliefs didn’t change.

“I understand what you’re saying. But intentionally irritating Lucifer.....”

“Lucifer is already obsessed with Ark’s existence.”

Park Woo-seong laughed and jumped in. And he reassured the worried Moon Ji-hun.

“Don’t worry. I assure you. It is better that Lucifer hears these words. Lucifer wishes for proof of his existence but getting revenge against the users. Ark is a goal that he has to exceed. It is better that he thinks of revenge against Hyun-woo than against humans. But Lucifer thinks of Ark as the enemy, not Hyun-woo. He is the rival that Lucifer desires most.”

Park Woo-seong knew Lucifer better than anyone. Moon Ji-hun nodded with an assured look after hearing Park Woo-seong’s words. He was also relieved that Hyun-woo’s requirements weren’t that great. However, Hyun-woo’s main conditions were from now on.

“The second condition is exemption from taxes.”

“Huh? T-tax exemption?”

“Isn’t it natural? I’m not playing the game for fun. The nation needs me to play the game so I’m putting off my personal matters. Of course, I am a citizen of Korea so I’m not going to ask for money. But shouldn’t this be sufficient as thanks?”

Hyun-woo had been forced to play the game against his will. However, he needed to get some benefits for any lack of sleep he would get. In fact, the worst part about being an advisor in Global Exos was the taxes. He used to be a gamer so he never had to worry

about taxes. He was just charged a commission when trading items in the auction room. But now he could feel the taxes. Most of the public works over the last few years had a deficit so the taxes had doubled. It was also common to see on TV news about public officials embezzling money. He was working yet it felt sour seeing his money going into their pockets. Now he was a high profit person so he had a lot of taxes.

“I should be exempt from taxes while playing the game and if I receive the final goal and defeat Lucifer then I’ll be exempt for life. I think I should be able to request that. Wouldn’t I be more motivated with a reward?”

“Oh, I’ll take a look.”

“Let me tell you the last requirement first.”

“T-the last one? Ah that’s right. You said there were three requirements. Yes. That is.....”

“Don’t worry so much. The last condition is the success fee I’d like to receive if I stop Lucifer. I’ll think it is fair to pay a price for defeating Lucifer.”

“I-I will have to meet with the government.....”

“It isn’t an unreasonable demand.”

“W-What is it?”

The eyes of the four men in the office focused on Hyun-woo. Moon Ji-hun was looking very anxious about what Hyun-woo would request. Hyun-woo looked around at them and laughed.

“I won’t say it now. You also won’t be able to agree immediately

so I'll send a note with the last condition along with the contract."

"C-contract?"

"Shouldn't my conditions be clearly written on a contract?"

Moon Ji-hun frowned at Hyun-woo's words but he couldn't say anything. The situation were clearly on Hyun-woo's side. There was no need to worry about holding his tongue when the government was his opponent.

.....Thus the negotiations finished. Hyun-woo then went on to ask something else.

"Lucifer is an artificial intelligence but he vowed to become the best user in Galaxian. But Lucifer won't hack the game in order to give him an advantage. If he wanted to do that then he wouldn't have used this method in the first place. He won't break Galaxian's rules even if his defeat was assured. You can 100% trust that."

That was Park Woo-seong's words. In fact, that was the part Hyun-woo was most worried about. Lucifer was an artificial intelligence that was able to seize the government's internet network in a few hours. Galaxian's firewalls wouldn't pose an obstacle to him. But if Park Woo-seong said Lucifer wouldn't use this power then Hyun-woo didn't need to worry. Because he could easily get his revenge by exploding the nuclear power plant. Even so, Lucifer wanted to compete equally with the users. Pride was an essential part of the artificial intelligence.

'It is annoying that he is a computer program. But my position is fortunate.'

"It is a fact that Lucifer has the ability to hack Galaxian's system.

That means we also have to obey Galaxian's rules while competing with Lucifer. Lucifer wouldn't use this power for himself but if he sees us break the rules then he might. Lucifer will press the switch without hesitation if he sees even the slightest suspicious movement. Yes, Lucifer won't blow up the nuclear power plants if I participate but he can still commit the act of terrorism if the government does something."

That's why the government had to rely on gamers. Of course, the government wouldn't just release their hold over the gamers. Then intended to make contact with the publishers of Galaxian to get a hint for the final goal. However, the publisher of Galaxian was a foreign company. Numerous problems could occur in other countries so they couldn't just pay attention to one. And the problem was the final goal was connected to the life force of the game. They invested billions of money into the game so they wouldn't give out that information so easily. Perhaps that was the reason why Lucifer chose Galaxian.

'If the government hadn't upgraded him.....'

Lucifer who was already cunning became even smarter.

"Will Lucifer really play fairly?"

"I guarantee it."

"Then I'll do it."

Hyun-woo answered with a confident expression. Moon Ji-hun offered to make offer Ark government support but Hyun-woo declined. If he received help from the beginning then it would obviously be useful. But receiving their support was no different to

be surveillance by the government. He had no intention of letting the government intervene with the way he played the game. He would settle it through the game system. Hyun-woo was the strongest person in New World. He later learned that other gamer that the government contacted also declined their offers of support. Even if the game was different, their pride as the strongest gamer was the same.

Anyway, the meeting ended there. The next day, all of Hyun-woo's conditions were accepted and the Galaxian unit was delivered. When considering the normal processing speed of a government agency, everything really was handled at the speed of light. There was no choice. Lucifer wouldn't wait.

“Is this the Galaxian unit?”

The Galaxian unit wasn't much different from New World's. The operation method was also similar. The game company heavily advertised that Galaxian would open at 7 a.m. The unit finished setting up at 9 a.m. He had already received 2 hours damage. He was impatient just thinking about it.

“Okay, shall I begin?”

Hyun-woo lowered his body into the unit and was engulfed in darkness. An endless dark space like it was the edge of the universe stretched out before him. Then he heard a firm voice speak the ARS message.

-You have started Galaxian. Please register the name of the user.

“Ark!”

Hyun-woo cried out without any hesitation. At the same time, there was an explosion of light and a new world unfolded in front of him. It was the return of the legendary gamer Ark.

Space 2: Galaxian

SPACE 2. Galaxian

Just a short note. I highly doubt that Weed will actually show up in this story since he does belong to a different author and story. The mention of Royal Road was probably just a cheeky reference.

“Hoo.....”

Ark looked around with interested eyes. When he first started at virtual reality game, he had been surprised by the movements of his character. However Ark wasn't a beginner anymore. Now Ark had spent almost every day in virtual reality. But New World was clearly different from Galaxian. It was the backdrop. Cosy villages, endless grasslands, magnificent forests.....this was the landscape of New World. The landscape that now caught Ark's eyes wasn't familiar. Everything was metal! The metallic walls were divided vertically and horizontally while the wide windows showed endless stretches of the universe. Just like the name Galaxian, the background of this game was SF.

“I can go into space!”

Space! The ancestors of the past wanted to experience the future so they created machines that could endlessly explore the universe. Galaxian was a game focused on the future. It was entirely different from New World. The sight set his sleeping gamer's blood boiling. That point was very important. If he wasn't interested in

the game then he would have problems with concentration.

“I’m only level 1 so there is a long way to go before I can explore space.....”

The people who passed by seemed like they were in SF and they wore space suits that he had previously seen in SF movies. Ark was also the same. He was carrying a bag. The bag was made with a metal material and there was a device that looked like a smartphone on his wrist. A 3D image appeared from it. It welcomed him to Galaxian. It also gave simple information for new users.

Currently it is the year 2357 and Earth has become barren 200 years ago thanks to environmental pollution. Therefore mankind turned to space to find a new sanctuary.

But the universe wasn’t a hopeful place like humans thought. The universe had infinite resources and infinite dangers. There were numerous unknown monsters and alien species. They weren’t benevolent to humanity.

Humanity suffered many setbacks but didn’t give up until they developed photon technology and technology to coat their body. This opened up a full-fledged space frontier. The pioneering age began as beginner pioneers took advantage to take their first steps into the universe.

You have arrived at the federal R-14 space station orbiting Earth. This is the starting point of his space pioneering adventure. If you conquer a large number of trials while exploring the universe then you will leave your name behind in human space pioneering history.

All the necessary information you need about Galaxian is attached to the terminal ‘Nymphé’ on your wrist.

Nymphé was the name of the device. Nymphé was the device shaped as a smartphone. A few icons were floating in a liquid crystal like an application button. He clicked on the icon of a person and the image became 3D. It was Ark’s character information window that recorded down his information.

| Character information window | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|
| Name | Ark (R-02788) | Level | 1 |
| Species | Human | Occupation | Beginner Pioneer |
| Fame | — | | |
| Health | 100 | Mental Power | 100 |
| Strength | 15 | Agility | 15 |
| Stamina | 15 | Wisdom | 15 |
| Intelligence | 15 | Luck | 15 |

The basics weren’t that different from other games. But Ark felt the difference was enormous. Ark had gained the master code and became a God in New World. Naturally all his stats were the best! This Ark would vomit blood if the Ark from New World even touched him. But all users in Galaxian started like that. The same applied to the AI Lucifer.

“It’s been a while since I’ve felt this feeling.”

Ark smirked and laughed. Lucifer would also be seeing the same information window somewhere else. The thought of Lucifer seeing such a poor information window was rather refreshing for

Ark. It also meant he could enjoy his growth from now on.

“Let’s see.....”

Ark erased the 3D image and looked around. The backdrop might be the future but the basic information window wasn’t that basic from a fantasy game. Similar occupations such as warriors, archers and magicians existed in Galaxian. Their names were just slightly different. So they were known as superconducting sword or gun or psychic powers instead of swords, bows and magic. Of course, it would be different once the details were more known but the game just opened so there was insufficient information. But there was no reason to be concerned as he would gradually learn as time passed. Level 1, level 1, level 1, all the users around him were level 1.

‘Is it in this area?’

When he looked around, he instantly saw a place where many users were gathered. The man gathered in the centre with a black beard was wearing a blue suit instead of the normal users wearing red. It was obvious what users would think about after just starting a game. When he wandered into that area and spoke to him, the answer was like he expected.

“You seem to be a novice based on the way you’re looking around. Is this your first time here?”

“Yes, I arrived a short time ago.”

“Then I’ll give you an introduction. I am Bhurad. I am in charge of R-14’s new pioneers training centre. Is there anything you didn’t understand?”

The NPC with a black beard said. Just yesterday he had been

playing New World so it was the first time he had met an NPC who wasn't respectful to Ark in a long time. His prickly attitude felt refreshing. It was like a noble experiencing the lives of an ordinary person.....heh, what was that? Anyway, he was always friendly to NPCs. That was Ark's default character.

“Ah, Centre Manager-nim. I am Ark.”

“Ark? Yes, Ark.”

Bhurad laughed after hearing the name.

“What's wrong?”

“No, it's not a big deal. I'm too busy to give such a simple explanation. Recently beginner pioneers have started to gather at this space station like cockroaches. The R-14 has some facilities but it is too hard to accommodate everyone. But if I leave them alone then they'll just become vagrants. That's what I thought. These young people just came into the universe and don't know anything about how it works. How is it? Is it a great idea?”

Bhurad laughed and rattled on.

.....He was an overly outspoken NPC.

“That is catching the space bugs.”

“Space bugs? There are bugs at this space station?”

“Before R-14 became frontier station like now, it was a space farm. We can obtain leather and meat from the space bugs so most of the space bugs have been genetically modified to propagate faster. But recently there have been a lot of youngsters so they are dying too soon. The chief of the space bug processing centre is also

worried. However, it will be difficult to send the youngsters out into space without any preparation or gear.” Therefore please take care of it.”

.....Even foreign workers were handled.

Despite the grief of having too many users, there was no choice.

“I’ll work hard.”

“I thought you would. Anyway, this is a federal training centre so the federal government will pay for beginner pioneers to hunt 20 space bugs. If you bring a suitable amount of leather and meat then further fees will be calculated.”

<Space Bug Processing (Repeatable)>

The R-14 space station is a gateway to the universe and the crew member Bhurad has given you a job for a vagrant. This work is to catch the space bugs in sectors 1~5. Not a lot of compensation can be given to beginner pioneers but it will help them quickly adapt to life in the universe. If you gather a certain amount of leather and meat then it is possible to receive bonus compensation.

* Target: Hunt 20 space bugs or gather 30 leather or meat from the space bugs.

Difficulty: G

The quest was registered on the Nymph.

“If you’ve decided then it is better to hurry. A lot of people have arrived so you’ll have many competitors. I don’t think there are a lot of people in district 2 so it is better to start there. However, keep this in mind. You can abandon the job but you won’t receive the compensation. If you die then you also won’t be given the rewards.”

Bhurad said and waved his hand. It was his first time but it wasn’t difficult to find the 2nd district. There were many monitors on the walls and ceilings that indicated a new area or had various advertisements. Ark followed the monitors towards the 2nd district while looking at his belongings through the Nymphe. His belongings appeared as icons on the screen.

-<Alloy Dagger>, <10 Purified Water>, <10 Space Food>

It was just like the character information window. He clicked on the dagger icon and a rough iron dagger soared from his backpack. If he hovered the item over the icon then it would be automatically stored. He finally arrived at the big gate that was the entrance to the 2nd district. Ark took out his dagger and entered.

“Now, shall I begin?”

And.....his mouth gaped opened. He saw an astounding scene after entering the 2nd district. It was a huge forest! He never imagined seeing such a landscape on a space station. But Ark wasn’t startled because of the forest. In a SF movie, he sometimes saw large space crafts flying towards botanical gardens to gather ingredients. When he thought about it, the space bugs were just like cattle. It was natural to make an environment to raise the

cattle. The problem was the crowd in the forest.

.....Users!

Bhurad said this was a place that raised space bugs. Looking at the scene now, it was like the users were being raised instead of the bugs. Users holding daggers swarmed over the forest like ants. The original space bugs couldn't be seen. No, they were seen. Sometimes big insects that looked like slugs crawled out from the ground. But Ark could barely see them before they were swarmed by players.

“A space bug!”

Seogeok! Seogeok! Seogeok! Seogeok!

The daggers continued to fall! The space bug quickly melted! It was like a group of piranhas gathering around 1 small fish.

“Damn! That's right, Galaxian is a game that opened today.....”

Galaxian was a game that users had been interested in for several years. It was to the extent that hundreds of thousands of units were sold throughout the world before the game opened. In other words, hundreds of thousands of users were flocking to the starting area at the same time. Of course, R-14 wasn't the only beginner area. There were dozens of terrestrial orbiting space stations that were the starting points for users. When combined with other races, hundreds of starting spots existed. At the same time, there were still thousands of people logging in and heading towards the hunting grounds so it wasn't a pleasant environment to hunt in.

“I have to catch 20 space bugs in a space like this?”

At this rate, he didn't even know if he could see 20.

"Yet I have no choice."

Ark sighed and entered the farm with a dagger. There were no space bugs left when he looked around restlessly.

"What are you doing?"

"Huh? Me?"

When he turned around, 5 people were approaching him.

"Are you just trying to catch the space bugs like that?"

"What are you doing? Don't you see that we've occupied this spot?"

"Spot?"

"Ah, really.....is this your first time in an online game?"

First time? Was this a joke? Wasn't he New World's Ark? Ark, don't they know? The words bubbled up in his throat but he pushed it down. Ark might've been a legendary gamer but right now he was level 1. If he showed off for no reason then he would just incur their ill feelings.

"This isn't my first time."

"Yet you don't know that this place is occupied? There are a lot of people gathered in this hunting ground so the person who occupies the spot first gets the right to it. If other people strike the monster first even though the spot is occupied then we won't hesitate to PK. Does that make sense now?"

.....Ark was stunned senseless. So far Ark had never played a

game that just opened. He always started a few months later. Therefore he never experienced fighting over a hunting ground. It had also been 4 years since he started New World so he was generally hunting in remote places alone. Ark had often heard of occupying a spot on online gaming sites but he had never experienced it.

“However, I can’t see any empty spots?”

“Do you see the people unable to hunt?”

“They’re all people waiting for a spot to open.”

“What if there is an empty spot?”

The group pointed towards the users gathered restlessly at the entrance. Then all of a sudden, the ground shook and a giant slug climbed through the ground. The group pushed Ark away and rushed to the slug.

“Get out of the way!”

Ark had no choice but to look around as they hit the bug. He felt a sinking feeling. However, he couldn’t question it. Ark didn’t understand it but he thought it was wrong. He really wanted to hunt the bugs but he would end up being PKed.

“Hunting in a party isn’t my style.....”

Once again, Ark wasn’t a user that liked parties. He didn’t want to worry about maintaining the relationship as well as dividing the items. A deep rooted distrust of users had been lodged in his head from his early days in New World. He was a user who didn’t really know how to hunt in parties! That had been Ark’s cardinal rule

during the past few years he was playing virtual reality games.

“Will the circumstances be easier elsewhere?”

He got fed up and headed towards the other farms but it was all the same. No, the 2nd district had the least users just like Bhurad said. Yet there were still 100 people looking for parties and a spot! The novice users couldn't go anywhere else other than these beginner areas. In the end, Ark was forced to give up and join the job hunting ranks. When he got closer, a message rose from the Nymphe's of the job hunters.

-Looking for a party spot. Level 1

-Unemployed person looking for a place. Level 2

-Save me. My wife and children are starving. Level 1

.....They were ads seeking employment.

‘Nymphes can also be used as a message tool.’

Ark found a space between the job seekers and also placed an ad. Soon a hunting person looking for 1 person approached.

‘Ah! An opportunity!’

Ark quickly raised his head. He reached out a hand and tried to approach him!

“Our party has one vacancy.....”

“Me! Me! Me!”

The market of human resources fluctuated at the appearance of an employer. The users flocked around him like vultures. Some users even fell down and were stepped on. However, the other

users didn't care. They were only committed to getting a job no matter what. It was a lack of jobs due to a population increase!

“Well, over there. You can apply to the party.”

“Yikes! Oh, thank you!”

‘.....What the, what's this?’

Ark had suddenly been pushed to a corner. When he received the quest from Bhurad, it felt like a foreign worker was receiving help. It wasn't pleasant but it couldn't be helped. Now it wasn't like a foreign worker receiving help but being sent down to a bustling job market. Yesterday Ark was a God in New World and now he had the status of a foreign worker.

It felt like he would just be sitting on the road overnight. And the number of unemployed people was always increasing so it was frustrating. There were approximately 100 people. In other words, it was an employment competition of 1 versus 100.

Moreover, that number increased over time instead of decreasing.

‘Should I come back in several days when it becomes free?’

But the game just opened so it would be like this for several months. This was an online game. If other people died then they would still be raising their levels for a while. So he would have to stay there. Needless to say, Ark wasn't playing the game for the same reason as others. This was the beginning of a competition with Lucifer. He couldn't stay idle for several months.

‘Yes, I have no choice but to obtain a party somehow!’

Ark braced himself and searched desperately for a job. However, it wasn't that easy to find a job for an unemployed person.

Moreover, the unemployed also had their own rules. Even maggots were divided into ranks. The senior unemployed occupied the front spots so they would catch the eyes of any employers first. Ark arrived late so he was placed in a corner where he couldn't really be seen. So he just sat there for 30 minutes.

‘Dammit, the party occupying a spot is so irritating. At this rate, I might not be able to swing my dagger for a few days. However, if I just steal a spot then I’ll be considered a freeloader and killed. What should I do? Is there some way to catch their eyes?’

Then something popped into Ark’s head.

‘If I’m trying to find a job then I can’t just sit here doing nothing. Yes, I need something to catch their eyes!’

Ark quickly modified the contents of his job search ad.

-Looking for a position. Level 1, my name is Ark.

He added his name to the advertisement. Ark had no doubt that this would change the situation. It sounded like condescending words. No, this might be a little smug but there was nobody in virtual reality games who didn’t know Ark’s name.

‘I was worried that someone else would take the name Ark.....’

Ark had typed in ‘Ark’ as his name as soon as he entered the game. Ark had connected 2 hours later than other users so he was worried that the name would be taken. Fortunately, no other user had taken the name Ark. It was lucky. The thought of losing his own name made him bitter. Anyway, the name Ark was now a famous brand in virtual reality games! Then he should take advantage of such a famous brand. Sure enough!

“Eh? Ark?”

An employer visiting the job market showed an interest. They swept past the swarming unemployed and sent a party invite to Ark.

“Hohoho, over there is Ark-nim so you can join the party.”

‘Huhuhu! Indeed! My name is not dead!’

He confirmed the effectiveness of his name. Ark had hives at the thought of joining a party but he had no choice! Anyway, it was better than the 100 users who couldn’t find a job. Now he could swing his weapon. Ark received the jealousy of everyone around her and ran up to the short haired user.

“Thank you. I’ll work hard.”

“I have seen the virtues of your name, Ark-nim.”

“Huhuhu. Yes, that is my name.’

“I also hunted together with another Ark a moment ago. So the name is appealing.”

Ark was bewildered by those words.

“Huh? Ark? Isn’t that my name?”

“Oh, you don’t know. Players can use the same name in Galaxian. It is restricted to 100 people with the same name because anything else would be too confusing. I’ve already seen 3 people with that name today.”

“Eh? What.....then how do we send mail or whispers?”

“There is a recognition number attached. Do you see the number

next to your name in the information window? That is your recognition number. I also just started so I don't know that well but the mail and whisper system seems to be through the recognition number instead of name."

He felt like he had been hit. Ark was a unique person in New World. Yet 100 users in Galaxian could have the same name.

'Is that why Bhurad reacted to my name?'

3 people with the name Ark had already been seen. If this continued then the name would be completely taken after one day. Of course, that was the price of Ark's fame but the thought of 100 more users with the same name didn't sit well with him.

"Oh, you picked someone with the same name."

"Kikikiki. His appearance is also similar. A human clone, he is a human clone."

"He looks better than the other Ark."

"Jackpot! Jamie-nim, your sense in picking party members is no joke!"

When he joined the group, the other party members immediately clamoured. The reason wasn't what Ark had expected. He had believed it was a rare name so the reactions would be something like 'Wow.' But now he was like mass produced goods!

'Dammit, if I knew then I would've chosen another name.....'

He registered the name Ark but now he felt like a comedian.

'No, maybe it's not a bad thing. I'm attached to this name but if I was the only user then the attention of other players would be

focused on me. It won't be like that if others have the same name. Yes, this name helped me get a job and it also won't attract the attention of other users.'

If he attracted attention then there would inevitably be difficulties. It could be a help rather than a hindrance.

'Even if there are others with the same name, in the end only one of them is real. He would prove his skills! He would show that he was different from the other clones! No, he would show it immediately.

'Huhuhu, I'll show them.'

Ark grinned as he looked at the laughing party members. The space bug crawled out in the area where Ark's party occupied.

'.....This is a chance!'

He would demonstrate his skills! Ark shot towards the space bug like lightning. Then the short haired user Jamie who invited Ark shouted.

"Ark-nim, it is risky to go alone!"

'I'm not a beginner like you.'

Jamie might think Ark was a copy but he was the real thing! He was the legendary gamer that ruled New World. He was already different from other level 1 users. He was acting like a high school student showing off but he wanted to show the NPCs and users.

'I'll show them the skills of the original Ark!'

Ark flew towards the space bug with his dagger. A critical hit and the space bug stumbled!.....That was what Ark expected.

However.....

-Your attack has failed!

He hadn't seen that message at all during the past year. At the same time, the space bug attacked and he lost 20% health.

“T-this is impossible.....”

“Ah, really! What are you doing?”

“The space bugs are level 4~7 monsters!”

“Why else do you think we're hunting in groups of 5 despite it being so tedious? 5 people are the minimum amount needed to hunt with the appropriate speed!”

“If we can hunt alone then we wouldn't even bother with a party!”

.....Ark was also aware of this. However, Ark was someone who could fight a group of monsters 20 levels higher than him alone. That was because a virtual reality game optimized Ark's physical capabilities. Galaxian was also a virtual reality game so he thought it would be the same. Even if his character changed, he was still the legendary gamer Ark. However, Ark finally realized an important fact. The abilities of Ark's body were definitely ahead of other users. If Ark's character was 100%, his physical ability would increase it to 200%. But that made it possible for Ark to bring up the strongest character. In other words, his physical abilities combined with the stats strength, stamina, agility etc. would improve his character! On the other hand, Ark was now level 1. It was a body that any warrior would feel ashamed of. It was like a

legendary martial artist would be reincarnated as a newborn baby. His body was that of a newborn baby but his mind was that of a martial artist. So his outstretched hand with the dagger.....ended up missing.

‘Yes, it was like that. I never even considered it. Even if the same system is applied, this is an entirely different game. I’m level 1. There are no stats to support my physical ability. Conversely, there is actually a penalty applied to my physical abilities. Even if a weightlifter came, he wouldn’t be able to lift a space bug at level 1.’

Ark realized this fact.

‘Although my physical ability won’t help, my battle experience is different. I have 4 years experience of fighting in a virtual reality game. If I readjust my senses to my character’s ability then even a level 1 player can fight against the monster!’

Practice! Practice was the only way to regain that feeling!.....He never thought those words would emerge from his mouth again. The party took care of the space bug and scowled at Ark.

“Is this your first time hunting in a party?”

“If you try to force it then it will be difficult for other people.”

“This is your first time so we won’t blame you but don’t do it again.”

“I picked you because you had the same name.....”

Even Jamie was giving him uncomfortable looks. A sigh naturally flowed out after receiving such evaluations.

‘Sheesh, hunting in a party really isn’t my thing.’

But he couldn't say anything or else he would lose his position.

'It can't be helped. I'll stop rushing. I can adjust my senses once I start hunting alone. It is important to raise my level and leave the beginner area. First I should handle the angry mood of the party.'

He was only level 1. But the unemployed people were still sending him envious glances.

"I'm sorry. This is my first time. I'll do it properly from now on."

Ark humbly said and obeyed the party. The hunting law of a party was simple. If a space bug appeared then stamped towards it. The space bug's attacks were so strong that it took 20% health with one blow but 5 people were less likely to fall into a critical condition. This was why all the parties in the 2nd district consisted of 5 people. 5 people was a good number to catch the space bug. It was a boring hunting method with no display of skills or tactics. He had no choice but to repeat the simple tasks.

-Your level has risen.

His level rose when that type of hunting continued. He hunted a few more and the <Space Bug Processing> quest was complete.

"The....the quest has been completed?"

"Then please report to Bhurad and receive it again. I'll leave a spot for you."

"Huh? Is this a repeatable quest?"

"Didn't you know? All the quests at the starting point are repeatable. This quest has the best experience and compensation.

It is hard to occupy a spot in the starter areas so if we repeat this quest then we can quickly reach level 10.”

Ark didn’t know that. The unit only had basic documentation about how to use it so there was no information on the quests. Of course, the party also had no prior knowledge. But they arrived 2 hours before Ark. There were quite a few differences between their experiences after 2 hours. Still, it was lucky that he joined the party of someone who snatched a spot early.

“Yes, then I’ll be going now.”

Ark rushed to the central square where Bhurad smiled with satisfaction and said.

“Hmm, there are a lot of novices gathered these days so you completed it faster than I thought. Anyway, thanks for your trouble. What do you want to do? Do you want to receive the compensation right now? Or do you want to reserve it as mileage points?”

“Mileage?”

Then an information window appeared from the Nymphe.

-You have completed your first quest.

There are two ways to receive compensation regarding a repeatable quest in Galaxian. It is to receive the reward right away or to reserve it as mileage. If you get then you will be immediately given the reward.

However, if you reserve mileage a few times then you will earn bonus experience and compensation. In addition, there is no need to report to the NPC as the quest will be automatically renewed and you can focus on hunting. If you are doing repeatable quests then I recommend the mileage method.

‘Hoh, there’s also something like this!’

It was possible to receive more compensation with the same quest. He also didn’t need to go back and forth between the hunting grounds and Bhurad as the quest would automatically be updated. He could level up quickly and leave the beginner area.

‘I’ll do this until I reach level 10!’

“I will earn mileage.”

“Understood. It will be recorded.”

Bhurad nodded and registered the quest. Thus Ark stayed in the 2nd area and dedicated himself to hunting so that he could escape from the beginner area. After the 5th mileage was registered, he gained 1 level to reach level 3. Although the hunting was repetitive, it was fun seeing his level rise so quickly. Once all his stats reached 20, he placed the bonus ones into agility. The only stats useful in the beginning when using a dagger were strength, agility and stamina. However, he was hunting in a party until level 10 so there was no reason to add to strength and stamina. Agility was more useful. His intention was to acquire the fighting style he had in New World. Meanwhile, two people left the party and another two

joined. After 5 hours and reaching level 4, Ark was the only person left from the original party. And greed raised its head.

‘Level 4! Now my level isn’t that different from that of the space bugs. I might be able to catch them by myself. Why do I need 5 people to make a party?’

If the party members decreased then the amount of experience would increase. And the <Space Bug Processing> quest didn’t have a required number of people to take care of it. One by one, the party members left and the numbers decreased. The personnel decreased much faster when mileage was reserved. Plus.....

‘I need to adjust my fighting sense to a new character quickly!’

Ark wasn’t impressed by just swinging a dagger when fighting. It was inevitable that he would start feeling impatience once he reached level 4. His desire to learn fighting in Galaxian made him greedy.

‘Even the risk of hunting alone would be enough.....’

The fighting over the hunting ground was fierce! The 2nd district users wouldn’t allow someone to hunt by themselves.

If he hunted alone then he would be targeted by other users for his spot. He had often seen people other parties have their spot taken away once the number decreased too much. He needed a minimum of 3 people! That was the minimum required to keep his spot.

‘I’ve found the three people for my party!’

Ark didn’t receive any more additional people from the meeting place.

“Is it really okay?”

“You don’t have to worry. Please believe in me.”

If he switched to a three person party then the experience and mileage rate would increase quickly.

-You have acquired the ‘Space Bug Leather.’

If the people were reduced then he could also collect more japtem. It was also possible to receive the <Space Bug Processing> quest by gathering leather and meat. The drop rate was low so despite the quest renewing 5 times, he had only received 20 leather and meat However, there was no reason to be impatient. All users were in the same circumstances and levelling up was more important than compensation right now. After he kept on hunting, a basic skill was generated.

-A new skill (Common Occupation ☆) has been learnt.

Space Combat (User, Passive): Before you entered the universe, you received basic combat training on earth.

However, the environment of earth and space is different. Actual fighting experience in space is required to utilize this battle technique. Now that you’ve adapted to space, your movements will become a little freer. This adaptation will allow your combat to become more successful.

<A 0.5% bonus will be given for each point in strength, agility, stamina, intelligence and wisdom> *

A battle skill of the novice pioneer that was locked has now been learnt.

This is a skill that anyone can learn. After fighting in a group, he learnt that some people were lacking combat ability. The space bug was a bug like monster in the beginner area. Their only attacks were biting and head-butting. However, Ark was also the same. Their movements when using the dagger were a little slack. Therefore he tried several strategic movements many times but he couldn't pull it off because of a lack of stats. However, that changed once his stats increased. His movements also improved after agility increased. His level increased to 5! This time he invested in stamina to reduce the risk.

‘That’s it! I’ve got the feeling! I can get to level 10 by the end of the day with this momentum!’

Ark was fully immersed in the combat.

.....That was a mistake.

He was so immersed in battle that he forgot an important fact. Ark realized it after defeating a space bug.

Kikikiki! Kikikiki!

He had been killing the space bugs in a party of 3 without any breaks. Thus Ark had a confident smile on his face while fighting.

“Take this! I will slice....eh?”

Ark flinched and stopped swinging his dagger. His dagger was blinking red.

There was only 1 durability left on the dagger! Ark's face was filled with confusion after checking the status in the Nymphe.

‘Huck! That’s right, didn’t equipment have durability?’

Ark's equipment in New World had infinite durability. He had made it like that with the master code because he felt annoyed with the constant repairing. Thus Ark hadn't needed to repair any items during the past year. So he had even forgotten the common sense stuff like repairing equipment after entering Galaxian! Thus Ark made a huge mistake because of his previous character.

‘How stupid.....!’

He only had one dagger in his bag. If it broke then he would become unemployed.

‘No! I can't lose the dagger!’

Ark hurriedly stopped the attack and withdrew. As soon as Ark stepped back, the space bug rushed towards the party member with the lowest health. The bug attacked and the member fell into a critical condition. The space bug devoured the party member and they died. The 3 people party was reduced to 2. In addition, Ark couldn't attack anymore! The remaining member was also level 2.

‘Do we have to run away?’

There were many users in the vicinity. If Ark ran away then he would be giving up the hunting spot. Once he left the spot he would once again be unemployed. Ark looked at the jobless in the corner who were staring with shining eyes.

‘No! If I leave here then I don’t know if I can get a job again!’

“Damn! Aslan-nim, try attacking from behind!”

“Huh? “U-understood!”

Aslan hesitated before attacking the space bug. However, he wasn’t a match for the space bug. It was okay with 3 or 5 people but a level 2 user stabbing didn’t do any damage. Now this was a 3 people party and one person was dead. The result of this battle was obvious! Ark’s health quickly reduced to 10%. He couldn’t run away any longer.

“Dammit!”

In the end, he was forced to wield his shield. One, two, three.....and it broke on the fourth blow.

Jjang!

The sharp steel blade turned into sand. He stared with desperate eyes as he felt a pain in his chest. His body drained of its strength. Death! The legendary gamer became the prey of the space bug after playing the game for 5 hours.

‘Damn, now I’m really embarrassed.’

At this point, Ark was still unaware. It wasn’t simply embarrassing. Ark only realized after he was revived with Galaxian’s system.

-Your body has been restored through the revival system ‘Fairy.’

| Character information window | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|-------|---|
| Name | Ark (R-02788) | Level | 1 |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|--------------|-------|--------------|------------------|
| Species | Human | Occupation | Beginner Pioneer |
| Fame | — | | |
| Health | 100 | Mental Power | 100 |
| Strength | 15 | Agility | 15 |
| Stamina | 15 | Wisdom | 15 |
| Intelligence | 15 | Luck | 15 |

Space 3: From the Beginning Again

SPACE 3. From the Beginning Again

R-14's central plaza. Space ships occupied one entire side of the plaza. Hundreds of eyes looked around every time a ship made a noise. People playing with their Nymphes were scattered here and there. Hundreds of ships continuously flew down towards the docks and the amount of people around was reminiscent of Yeoido Plaza when it was the World Cup. They were the users who had just begun Galaxian. Of course they were keenly interested! If they grasped the new system and raised their level faster than other people then they had a chance of conquering the universe first. Deep in a corner of the central plaza. There was a young man wrapped in a gloomy aura. The young man locked in a gloomy atmosphere was Ark. Ark looked out the window with spiritless eyes.

“That is Earth.....”

The earth where humanity lived used to shine with a blue light. But the Earth that he saw through the window had turned to a dark brown. The ignorant humans had been too greedy and turned it into a barren land 200 years ago. In the end they left Earth for space, making them seem like shameless children eating off their parents until coldly discarding them after the parents died. When Ark first came to R-14, he hadn't been interested in Earth. He just thought it was a good setting as a background. Now he felt different. His circumstances weren't much different from the

earth dying because of human greed. The difference between Ark and the earth was that he was the cause of his suffering. Ark blankly stared at the earth while pulling at his hair.

“Stupid! Bastard!”

More knowledge would only cause confusion. That was Ark's theory. But he was starting a new game. When Ark stated New World a long time ago, he had experienced some troubles because he didn't know the basic information. Well, it was thanks to that incident that Ark managed to find a hidden class and became the strongest in New World. Therefore Ark made sure to learn the basic information about Galaxian. One thing he learnt was the revival system.

--<Galaxian Revival System 'Fairy.'>

- This is the revival system in Galaxian.

- Through the cloning technique discovered in the 2000's, users will automatically have the registered genetic information restored as flesh after they die. The body will be 100% identical to the registered information.

- If you use this system then considerable resources are needed to restore the body.

- The higher level a registered person is, the more resources it would consume. If you lack the necessary resources then the body might not be restored properly. The damage to the body and spirit is intense

and you might end up disabled for your whole life. However, the federal government wants to encourage space pioneering so this service will be free for beginner pioneers.

-There is the revival system so I don't have to worry even if I die!

-Please use this.

‘Don't have to worry even if I die?’

.....It was sugar-coating it. If he died then he would be 100% restored using the registered genetic information. This meant he wouldn't lose experience or stats if he died. Of course it cost a lot of money but it was better than the normally severe death penalty in other virtual reality games. However, this system was a trap. Only the genetic information stored would be revived. If he raised his character from level 1 to level 100 and didn't register the information, he would be reset to level 1 if he died. Furthermore, there also weren't many revival systems. Only places of civilization like towns would have one. Once the user left the beginner area and started earnestly exploring the universe, it would be difficult to find a revival system in certain areas. In other words, if he died during fighting in the field then all that experience would disappear.

‘Dammit, don't worry?’

It was like the system was saying not to level up.

“I was aware.....”

R-14's revival system was in the central plaza. The revival system was the first thing he saw when he first started the game. But Ark never registered. This was due to the mileage quest reward so he never dared to leave the hunting ground for fear of losing his spot. In addition, there were thousands of users hunting in the 2nd district so he could count the number of dead users during his 5 hours with his fingers. He never even considered that the legendary gamer Ark would die in such a place. This was the penalty he received for his arrogance.

‘All my experience from the 5 hours hunting has flown away!’

5 hours of experience wasn't a long time in game hours. But now those 5 hours felt like a whole life time to Ark. It was a lifetime of experience. Ark also lost the ‘Space Combat’ skill that he learnt. However, that wasn't Ark's main problem now.

‘The problem is the dagger!’

To be exact, it was the broken dagger. Naturally the dagger wasn't restored by the revival system. The experience could probably be recovered but the dagger was gone forever. It might just be a basic beginner dagger but it was Ark's only weapon and fortune. Now his entire fortune had disappeared. But he still had hope when he revived. He had completed the quest 8 times so he could turn in the mileage points for bonus compensation. ‘This might be a beginner quest but I can't survive without a dagger.’ So Ark had visited Bhurad after reviving. However, the visit to Bhurad just caused despair.

“Your mileage has been destroyed.”

“Huh? D-destroyed?”

“Didn’t you hear what I said? I can’t give rewards to someone who died from a space bug.”

He remembered hearing something like that when receiving the quest.

“But I built up some mileage before I died.”

“The accumulated mileage needs to be registered to get the reward. If you died during a mission then all that mileage will disappear. You came here without knowing something like that? If you didn’t understand then you should’ve just taken the reward every time.”

“You said that you recommended the mileage.....”

“What? Do you intend to blame me?”

Bhurad’s face turned serious. Naturally Ark was furious since it felt like he had been scammed of his mileage. He really wanted to rip off the beard but there was still the matter of the dagger. What profit would a level 1 character have if he grasped the neck of a NPC? Ark sighed and tried to appeal to his sympathy.

“Actually, I broke my dagger while fighting the space bugs. If I don’t receive compensation then I can’t do anything. Can you please look over this matter one time?”

“It is the rule so I can’t help you.”

He grinded his teeth.

“The revival system is expensive A trivial pioneer like you won’t have that much money. Due to the federal policy, R-14 has no

choice but to offer a free service after the proliferation of pioneers so the budget is suffering. Nevertheless, some pioneers are still trying to play tricks. The space station wouldn't be able to keep operating if I did something like this. So just think of it as a fee."

The explanation didn't help. Curses rose in his throat but he pushed it down. He wanted to ask more questions but.....

"Ah, can you get out of the way if your request is finished?"

"Are you the only one receiving the quest? Don't you know there are people waiting?"

The players behind him became impatient so he was forced to leave. It was regrettable. There were a lot of things he wanted to question. However, wasn't a NPC just a system? Of course, if his intimacy with the NPC was higher than something might've been possible. But he only talked to Bhurad when accepting the space bug quest. And since Ark died, his spot in the 2nd district was gone. Even if he tried to get employed again, what party would invite him when Ark didn't even have a dagger? It was a crisis where there was a possibility that he would become homeless!

'And the cause of that.....'

At first he blamed Bhurad for not explaining properly. He then blamed himself for not reading the quest related information properly. However, Ark realized the fundamental problem after becoming depressed in a corner.

'Yes, the problem was my mental state from the beginning.'

When he first started Galaxian, he was starting from level 1. He didn't realize it but he had a sense of entitlement from his status as

a legendary gamer and had a different attitude from the other gamers. He used the name 'Ark' in his job advertisements and unreasonably fighting with 3 people was also the result of that arrogance. It was the arrogance created by becoming a legendary gamer! Once he thought about it, all his problems started from there.

'I thought that my lack of level and skills wouldn't matter when fighting the space bugs. But it isn't like this. Obviously New World's Ark was strong. If I enter again I will be strong. But it is different. Ark is only strong in New World. I thought if I created Ark then I would have the power of the strongest character behind it.....'

There was no reason for him not to be strong. He didn't need to worry before fighting. Ark never realized that his abilities as a warrior were rusty. Ark thought he wasn't accustomed to battling in Galaxian but he had actually lost his battle sense a long time ago. Even the strongest warrior would become old once he sits down on a throne.....

Jjak-!

"Wake up Ark!"

Ark slapped his cheeks with both hands. Ark didn't start this game to become idle. He came in here with a clear goal. Of course, Ark wanted to stop Lucifer but he didn't have a 'Saviour' disease. He didn't fall into the delusion that he was Superman. However, he wanted to achieve it once he accepted. He would make a strong resolution to accomplish it. It was with this confidence that he was able to make a deal with the government. His overconfidence

ended him with him making a huge mistake.

‘If I continue to be depressed then I can’t fix this!’

Ark realized his mistake after reflecting. However, there was no time to dwell on the past. If he couldn’t abandon his regret then he wouldn’t be able to move forward. Ark discarded his regret and thought again.

“I’m not the hero of New World here. There is no legendary gamer. This is a starting point. Right now I am the beginner pioneer Ark who just entered the universe.”

Ark shook off everything that happened. At the same time, the legendary gamer Ark died. And the level 1 beginner pioneer Ark was born. Ark now knew what to do. Something appropriate for a level 1 user!

“Hehehe, hello?”

Ark greeted while fiddling with his hands nervously. Bhurad sent him a look and declared sharply.

“What? You still can abandon your regrets?”

Bhurad didn’t have a good opinion of Ark after the mileage problem. Ark shook his head and spoke quickly.

“No. I became extremely embarrassed after recovering my senses. After staying in that corner and thinking, I realized that it was my fault.”

“I’m glad you understand.”

“So I wanted to visit you to apologize.”

“Apologize?”

“Yes, I was too short-sighted. How many people have come to R-14 now? I can’t fathom how you deal with so many stupid people alone. For someone like me to question you about mileage, it is natural that you would become angry.”

Ark said while continuing to wring his hands. This was what Ark came up with. If he raised his public image with NPCs in a virtual reality game then it would benefit him. Ark knew that the intimacy system also existed in Galaxian. However, he had wanted to leave the beginner area after starting the game so he didn’t feel the need to raise his intimacy with the NPCs. But now the situation had changed. Ark’s dagger was broken so he was literally a beggar! The conclusion Ark came up with was that he needed to talk. The other users also thought like Ark and wanted to escape from the beginner area.

Therefore Ark was the only one trying to get close to a NPC. So he was going to raise his intimacy with Bhurad! That was the first thing Ark needed to do now. In fact, this was an area that Ark was an expert in. Ark was a user who could act subservient to a NPC. Once he decided, his tongue moved smoothly like oil.

“Actually, I’ve been watching while lingering in the corner of the plaza. And I realized that you never sat down despite how many hours passed.”

“That is the regulations for the crew.....”

“I also realized this. I became really impressed after watching you thoroughly stick to the rules.”

“The attitude of the crew is recorded on the CCTV.....”

“That’s not it. It would be the same even if there was no CCTV! How many civil servants could still act like that despite receiving complaints? Bhurad-nim is someone with firm beliefs. You are indeed the paragon of a civil servant.”

Bhurad had a bad impression of Ark but his smooth words gradually loosened him up. Not a lot of time was needed for the effects to show.

“Can’t you make it a little quicker? Don’t you know there are people waiting?”

“Hey! Can’t you see that I’m speaking now? Why are you making such a fuss?”

Bhurad scowled and retorted after hearing the users’ complaints. And his expression softened after looking at Ark.

“Well, in regards to my words earlier. Like you said, my nerves are slightly sensitive after being swarmed by so many new pioneers. Please understand.”

“How can I not understand? It is the rules.”

“Yes, in fact I also felt sorry regarding your situation. But how can I go against the rules? Although I have a pain in my heart, I can’t do anything despite my position. So I hope you don’t dwell too much on the past and firm up your heart.”

“Thank you. I might’ve lost my dagger after just entering the universe but I’m glad I can meet someone who gave me sincere advice.”

“Aha! This friend, are you trying to make me tear up?”

Bhurad sent him a worried look.

“By the way, what are you going to do now? You don’t have your dagger so won’t it be difficult for you to find a job?”

“That’s why I wanted to ask Bhurad-nim. I don’t have a dagger so I can’t catch the space bugs and I don’t know anyone here. So I wanted to ask Bhurad-nim if there is any work other than catching a space bug.”

This was one of the reasons why he tried to restore the relationship with Bhurad. This was the beginner area. The users were starting Galaxian for the first time so there would be some type of basic tutorial. This was a place where users would come and go like a tide so the <Space Bug Processing> quest couldn’t be the only one. After checking around the docks and plaza, the only quests he could receive had to do with fighting. Therefore Ark had felt hopeless until now. But when he thought about it, it was somewhat strange. There was a chance that users other than Ark would break the dagger at an early stage. If they were handling a weapon for the first time then there was a chance that it would break so they needed other ways to eat. Of course, the ones who held the key were NPCs. Bhurad was the manager of R-14’s training centre so he was influential. Their relationship was shaken after the mileage problem but a little appreciation changed that.

“I have no other work.....this place certainly isn’t lacking in manpower. Well, there are the maintenance jobs that most people shun in favour of catching the space bugs. That is.....”

Bhurad suddenly raised his head.

“Ah, that’s right. I recently talked to the manager of sector 7 who was complaining. He might have a job for you but.....”

“But?”

“Even if you work there all day, you’ll only receive a few copper coins. Is that still okay?”

If this continued then he would become homeless. This wasn’t a situation where he could choose between cold rice or hot rice.

“I’ll work hard.”

“Indeed, I’m sure you will. Then follow that passage and you will reach sector 7. Find someone called Cheksun and tell him that I sent you.”

“Thank you. I’ll work hard and will come back after preparing another dagger.”

“Okay. I’ll be waiting.....”

Bhurad muttered with a concerned look but Ark didn’t pay him any attention. Having work was better than leaving empty handed. Ark ran like the wind towards sector 7. R-14 was always lighted up and space was seen through the windows so it was hard to get a concept of time but it was actually evening now. So the users saturated R-14 increased even more and most of them were in the 1~5 sectors for the <Space Bug Processing> quest. Thus from sector 6 onwards, it became noticeably quieter as these were the management facilities. He finally entered sector 7.

“W-what’s all this?”

Ark looked around with wide eyes. The first thing he saw were pipes. The pipes were tangled like spider webs inside a huge forest like space. But the thing that stimulated Ark's curiosity were the deep jellyfish like existences hanging around the pipes. No, they were NPCs who looked like deep black octopuses. One octopus was wandering around holding a bucket that contained various tools.

‘What are those octopuses? Are they livestock that are being raised here?’

“Who are you?”

Then he heard a rough voice from behind him. When he turned around, he saw a scowling man wearing overalls covered in oil. Although he had a bald head, he was still a human.

“Are you Cheksun?”

“So?”

“I am Ark. Bhurad told me that you had a job request.”

“A job request? Did you hear what you have to do?”

“I didn't hear about it.”

“Sheesh!”

Cheksun clicked his tongue. He indicated towards the pipes and said.

“That right there is your work. Do you see the pipes? That is R-14's air circulation device. All of the air in R-14 passes through that device. The job is to clean the pipes. You have to crawl inside the pipes, remove any impurities, tighten the gears and oil them. Can you do something like that?”

“I’ll work hard.”

“Everybody says that.”

Cheksun snorted.

“Many ignorant novices who had newly arrived at R-14 tried before you came. They all said they would work hard but then ended up leaving after 1 hour. Damn, there’s no one with guts these days.”

“I’m different.”

Ark replied in a firm voice. That’s right. Ark was different from those users. The users who first visited here probably thought there would be a hidden quest. So they accepted as soon as a quest was given but ended up giving up. However, Ark’s position was different from the users who only visited due to curiosity. He didn’t have a dagger like everyone else. After losing the dagger, he had been lost in despair and also ate his Space Food and drank his Purified Water. If he didn’t find a job then he might by the first user in Galaxian to die of starvation! He would do whatever it took. He had to gather enough money to buy a dagger.

“Just watch me. I won’t disappoint you.”

Ark replied in a disciplined voice. Cheksun just nodded with an expression that didn’t expect much.

“Then give it a try.”

-<Cleaning R-14’s Air Circulation Pipes (Repeatable)>

This is maintenance work to clean R-14’s air

circulation pipes. The air circulation system is an important facility that maintains R-14. It is notorious for being the worse working environment in R-14.

Difficulty: –

He finally received a quest. The newly born Ark started cleaning the pipes.

“Phew!”

Ark wiped the sweat and raised his head. The previous black area was now polished beautifully. Watching the pipe turn out like that was refreshing.....

The pipe used to be filled with dirt and had a bad smell but now it had become beautiful thanks to Ark. Ark felt refreshed but didn't feel like wiping it again.

“Has it been a few days already? I've really gone around the place.”

The quest had no rank. Ark knew there was a difference in compensation. After receiving the quest from Cheksun, he could get a reward for it every time he cleaned a 200 metre long pipe. The time it took to crawl inside a narrow pipe and scrub it took around 30 minutes. It wasn't a quest that took a long time but the problem was the reward!

“I worked for hard for 30 minutes and I can only receive 40 copper.....”

Despite being set in the future, Galaxian used copper, silver and

gold coins as currency. It was unexpected but there was a reason for it. The future of humanity built a space colony and there weren't only humans in the galaxy. Alien species and even robots existed. The bills humans used were just pieces of paper to them. The common currency in the universe was minerals such as gold, silver and copper. In other words, they used gold, silver and copper. No, that didn't matter right now. Who cared if the money was in dollar, euro or yens?

The important thing was that he was being paid in copper, the currency with the lowest value. 100 copper was 1 silver, 100 silver was 1 gold. In other words, 1 gold was 10,000 copper. In the previous virtual reality game, 1 gold was traded in for 10,000 won so 40 copper was only 40 won..... That was the value in reality but 40 copper wasn't a lot of money in Galaxian. Yet Ark still didn't lose hope.

'I can receive 40 copper for crawling inside the pipe, cleaning it, tightening and oiling. It certainly isn't a lot of money compared to how much I got in New World. It is natural. But I have to do it. Is 40 copper really 40 won?'

If he completed the quest 10 times then he got 40 silver! Ark expected that he could get a weapon and raced to the central square. However, any hope of acquiring a weapon crumbled as he saw the daggers on the shelves.

-Modified Alloy Dagger

Item type: Dagger Wearer Restriction: –

Attack: 4-5 Durability: 25/25

A used dagger commonly found in space. It is an easy dagger to use outdoors. The federal government wants to encourage beginner pioneers so it is sold at a discount.

Beginner pioneer special discount price: 1 gold and 50 silver

It was the least expensive dagger and it was 1 gold 50 silver!.....That was also the special discount price. Ark dealt with hundreds of thousands of gold in New World but now 1 gold and 50 silver was an astronomical amount to him. 1 gold and 50 silver! 15,000 copper! He had to complete the pipe cleaning quest 375 times. That was cleaning 75 kilometres.

“No way! This isn’t work but exploitation!”

No wonder why the users who visited with curiosity broke straight away. Earning 40 copper for every 200 metres? But Ark had no other choice. If he couldn’t even earn 10 copper then he would starve to death. Despite the exploitation of his hard labour, he couldn’t report Cheksun to the human labour services.

‘Those octopuses.....!’

Ark glared at the octopuses. Sector 7 was the first place he saw the octopuses. They were like octopuses. No, their appearances were 100% octopuses but they were actually an alien species called Charenjok. He asked Cheksun about them.

“Originally this didn’t need a lot of maintenance. It was fine

when I first started. But a few years ago, the situation once the Charenjok refugees started flooding in. The Charenjok are stupid and don't know what to do. Despite that, the galactic federation accepted them as refugees so we gave them the pipe cleaning job. We understood the circumstances and gave them enough for meals but that has placed a burden on the budget. So we have no choice but to cut the compensation for the job.”

The influx of foreign workers had caused the wages to fall. A problem in the 21st century was recreated in the 24th century.

“I was still hoping for.....”

He had actually expected something when accepting the <Clean R-14's Air Circulation Pipes> quest. It was a quest that the other users didn't do properly so there still might be something hidden. He had such expectations since it was such a ridiculously low reward. But he had been cleaning for a long time so he threw away those expectations. It had been two days since he started this quest. During this time, he completed it 70 times and received 14 silver but the reward didn't change. No, there was one small thing that changed.

“Kkuluk, kkuluk.”

Sometimes an octopus would approach while he was resting. There was an odd sound and strange letters appeared from the Nymphé.

-Hey, young friend. Are you done over there?

It was the universal translator on the Nymphé that allowed him to understand the Charenjok.

“Yes, I’m done.”

–We’ve also finished over here. Then shall we take a break before moving on?

The elderly (maybe) Charenjok sat down next to Ark. He pulled out a crumpled cigarette butt and muttered.

–Hu, I long for the old days. The place we used to live was a beautiful castle on wide tidal flats. The times when I jumped into the tidal flats were the happiest moments of my life. If it wasn’t for the invasion of the Kakajok then I’ll still be living happily now. But that is now in the past. The planet was ravaged by the Kakajok so it isn’t inhabitable anymore. I just have to be thankful that I can live in a place like this.

-You have listened to the Charenjok’s bitter past.

<Intimacy with the Charenjok has increased by 1>

The Charenjok would talk to him out of nowhere and their intimacy would increase. Of course, he wasn’t happy even if he became familiar with the octopuses. He didn’t care when he first started but Ark changed his mind after listening to the octopuses. Anyway, there were cleaning the pipes in the same place so it wasn’t bad to become more familiar with them. Most of the time they complained about their circumstances but they sometimes talked about interesting things.

-The currency used in the universe is gold, silver and copper.....

He already knew this.

–We once had a civilization that was ahead of Earth’s. We used to take spaceships to Earth for sightseeing. The Earthlings at the time though we were Martians?

The octopuses were the identity of the UFOs and aliens. He didn’t know why such aliens were cleaning pipes.....

–You’re in a place like this so you must also have some circumstances. But don’t be too disappointed. Life is long. You shouldn’t wallow in frustration for too long. If we try hard and don’t lose hope then someday we will surely meet a bright future.

The octopuses were mistaken.

‘No. Its not like that. The octopuses’ future is dark.’

Ark had completed Cheksun’s quest 70 times. The curious users only attempted a few times before quitting so Cheksun had derision for them. But he looked at Ark with different eyes since Ark completed it 70 times. According to Cheksun, the galactic federation were the ones who placed the Charenjok here. The octopuses’ fate was to crawl through the pipes generation after generation. The Charenjok were the main culprit for Ark’s low wage. He was poor. But there were other reasons.

–Haha, I listed some unnecessary complaints again.

The octopus put out the cigarette and twisted its body. Then Ark felt a scathing pain in his fingertip.

“Ouch! Again.....”

–Your skin has been torn by a sharp metal inside the polluted pipe.

<Your stamina has fallen by 10 thanks to tetanus. You will receive 2 damage every 10 seconds for 10 minutes>

Sometimes he received such injuries when crawling through the pipes. The pipe cleaning was a repeatable quest so it was also possible to save mileage. If he saved mileage then it was possible to receive bonus rewards. However, sometimes he would be careless and would receive injuries. Therefore Ark didn't want to waste 5 hours again if he used mileage. However, that instantly changed after he became familiar with the octopuses.

-Oh, be careful.....

The Charenjok laid its hand on Ark's injury. The scar instantly went away and the tetanus was treated. The octopuses had the ability to treat injuries. That wasn't all. They had the body of an octopus which was an animal that could fit into small holes. The Charenjok resembled an octopus and could easily crawl through the narrow pipes. They took care of his tetanus and the narrow pipes. So the Charenjok was a species optimized for pipe cleaning. The galactic federation hadn't placed them here for no reason. Despite that.....they were still poor octopuses.

'But I'm not worried about the octopuses.'

Ark sighed and stared at the endless pipes. He had completed 70 quests in two days. He still needed to complete it 300 more times to buy a dagger. That required at least a fortnight. When he first

received the quest, Ark thought it was a consideration from the game publishers for users who broke their daggers. After seeing the endless pipes, it felt like the publisher was saying ‘Huhuhu, these stupid children.’

‘The government brought me in to stop Lucifer yet I’m stuck cleaning pipes for a fortnight instead of raising my level.....’

He really couldn’t laugh about it. If he thought about it, he made huge mistakes when first starting New World and ended up killing rats for a fortnight. But at least he learnt battle skills then. Now he was just wiping the pipes instead of fighting.

‘Should I stop here?’

He sometimes had that idea. It had only been opened for 2 days but Galaxian was already popular so gold was already being sold in the auction site. And Ark wasn’t poor after playing New World. No, to be honest he was rich! Even if the market price was expensive, he could afford to buy 1 gold and 50 silver. However Ark shook his head.

‘No, I can’t do that!’

Games were a place to earn money, not use it. And Ark was a gamer. His pride wouldn’t allow him to go against his values to buy gold. No, it wasn’t just his pride. Ark had received an invitation from the country so he couldn’t give up so early in the game. Ark used his pride to place a padlock on the idea. Ark rose to the strongest spot in New World because of his skills. It was desperation. He was able to catch mice for a fortnight because of desperation. Right now Ark wasn’t desperate. His stomach was full

so Ark couldn't feel desperate.

'It isn't difficult to buy gold to escape from this. But there is no way to regain all that time. This is all my money in Galaxian. If I can't earn money in Galaxian then Ark won't be reborn. Yes, this isn't just a job to collect money. This is a process to regain my spirit and be reborn!'

In virtual reality games, the user's attitude was the most important. That was the process Ark used to become the strongest person in New World. If he continued for a fortnight then his mental state would be solidified.

'This is the best thing for a hungry spirit!'

The change in thought instantly showed in his behaviour. Until now, he had entrusted the worse areas to the Charenjok who were optimized to clean pipes. It was natural. Thus he had just been swinging around with a dust cloth.

'Well, it is natural not to feel motivated when working for such a low wage.....'

However, now Ark was different. Now the 40 copper reward didn't matter. The pipe cleaning was ego training for Ark. Cleaning the pipes was the optimal environment to train his pride. Ark's desire to go level up was suppressed. Ark became motivated to clean the wipes the octopuses had been working on. The hustle and bustle around him that made it hard to concentrate was appropriate to train his mental state. Therefore Ark cleaned every corner of the pipe and didn't allow one stain. He didn't even condone loose screws. He tightened and oiled it quickly and

accurately! His breath felt clogged after crawling into the narrow pipes but Ark shook it off and continued cleaning. He was like a person born for that purpose! That tenacity continued for 4 days.

Boduk boduk, boduk boduk.....flash!

The pipe sparkled after using the power of his whole body! An unexpected information window then appeared from the Nymphe.

-A new skill (Common Occupation ☆) has been learnt.

Facilities Maintenance (User, Passive): You learnt this skill after putting all your concentration into maintaining the facilities. It isn't useful for combat but it will be helpful for quests where labour is required. Now the amount of dirt wiped, the tightening of screws or nuts and oiling has increased by 30%.

<The facilities maintenance speed has increased by 30%. Now you are able to maintain more complex facilities. In addition, it would take more time for pollution to come back and will decrease the need for frequent maintenance>

“S-skill?”

Ark's eyes widened as he looked at the information window.

“That's it! If I concentrate on one thing in Galaxian then a related skill will be made!”

Facilities Maintenance was different from Space Combat. He obtained Space Combat when fighting. But Facilities Maintenance was a skill he obtained after working for a long time. Just like New World, Galaxian's skill system depended on the users' behaviour and maintenance. This wasn't written in the instructions! He discovered it after spending 5 days cleaning the pipes. However, this wasn't the only reward. Thanks to the skill, his quest completion time was also reduced. Therefore the limit of 30 times a day increase to 40.

“Hum, nice work. I thought you would give up but you endured for 5 days. I've been watching and the octopuses' working speed has also doubled. Thus I will make you the leader of the cleaners.”

Cheksun gave Ark an impressed look after the 200th time he completed the quest. Then an information window appeared from the Nymph.

-You have received the title <Cleaning Foreman> from Cheksun.

The manager of sector 7 has recognized your work. He had therefore appointed you the foreman of the Charenjok cleaning the R-14 air circulation pipes. In addition, the compensation for the quest has increased to 60 copper.

<Title Effect: Cleaning Foreman (Agility +3)>

‘A title!’

Ark's eyes started flashing. He was level 1 and the title gave him 3

points in agility.

‘The reward has jumped from 40 copper to 60 copper!’

Ark inwardly cried with delight at the 50% pay rise. 60 copper.....60 won. Pride training for 5 days in the pipes. Ark was gradually changing his nature to be reborn.

SPACE 4: The Octopuses' Dream

SPACE 4. The Octopuses' Dream

“It must be near here.....”

Ark walked between the complicated connected pipes. One day had passed since he had been appointed as the Cleaning Foreman. He got a pay rise so Ark was even more motivated to clean the pipes. And there was something that offended him. Sometimes there would be an unidentified boom and the pipe would vibrate.

“Ah, you mean that? Don't pay attention to it. The temperature difference between R-14 and the space outside is intense. Sometimes the temperature will twist a pipe between the inside wall and the barrier, causing those types of noises.”

Cheksun explained after he heard it the first time. So he just ignored it but after a while he realized that not all the noises were the same. Sometimes he heard iron twisting and other times it sounded like someone was hitting away at the pipes.

‘It doesn't sound like the pipe twisting.’

He tried to ignore it but the sound got on his nerves. In the end, Ark couldn't resist his curiosity and started to search for the truth. Figuring out the direction the pipe was coming from wasn't an easy task. Furthermore, the pipes were entwined in complicated ways like blood vessels so he would sometimes go in the wrong direction. It was like trying to find something in Seoul by listening to a voice.

‘It seemed to be coming from someplace close so I thought it would just take a short time.....’

He already came this far so he couldn’t give up. It certainly wasn’t an easy task but Ark had already been here for more than a week. He listening to the sound while cleaning the pipes and felt like he was gradually approaching it. The sound that seemed to come from a distance became much louder.

‘I’m almost there. It is clearly close to here!’

“Eh? This.....?”

Ark looked around doubtfully after crawling through the pipe. The lanterns illuminated something wriggling near the pipe. Only Ark’s head had emerged from the pipe but he could recognize the identity of the object. It was the familiar form of the Charenjok.

“Hey! You over there!”

The octopus flinched as Ark yelled. It craned its neck and stared at Ark with consternation.

-Hik! H-h-how is Foreman-nim here?

“Why are you so startled? Are you just playing around in a place like this?”

-Ah, no! Playing around? I.....

“Well it doesn’t matter. Did you hear the sound just then?”

-S-sound? No, I haven’t heard anything?

“You didn’t hear anything?”

Maybe it couldn't be heard if the octopus was working far away. Ark often didn't hear it while concentrating on cleaning. But he followed the sound to this location. He had heard the sound a short time ago although he didn't hear it anymore. It was impossible for the octopus not to hear it. The octopus talking to Ark wasn't deaf.

'Come to think of it.....'

It had been very upset the first time it saw Ark. The octopuses' skin changed colour depending on their emotions! Ark looked at the colour of the octopus suspiciously and asked.

"What are you hiding?"

-H-h-hiding? N-nothing!

The octopus' skin became mottled and it shouted wildly. Its insistence just made Ark more doubtful. Ark slightly pitied it. However, Ark couldn't withdraw from this situation.

"Really? Then get out of the way."

-W-why?"

"I'm trying to find what is causing the ringing of the pipes. I clearly heard it in this area a short time ago. So I'm going to search around this area."

-I said there wasn't any sound!

"I heard it."

Ark pushed aside the restless octopus. No, he tried to when his hands slipped and he slid down. The area behind the octopus inclined like a slide. Ark hurriedly stretched out his hand but his body had already slipped down. And.....cheolpeok!

“W-what is this? Mud? Why is it in a place like this.....?”

Ark lifted his head from where it was stuck in the mud. A landscape he couldn't imagine was lit up by the lanterns.

“W-what's all this?”

The scale of the place was so large that Ark couldn't even measure it. It was amazing that such a place could be found in the R-14 space station but the more amazing thing was the amount of space bugs filling the area. Thick mud filled the place and a countless number of space bugs swarmed. And octopuses were gathered around and looking busy.

“T-this is?”

The octopuses flinched at his voice.

–Eek? F-Foreman? Why is Foreman-nim here.....?

–This is serious! We were found! We were found!

-Ack! We're screwed!

The octopuses started freaking out. Ark was about to open his mouth when he heard.

–Everyone calm down!

One octopus shouted. It was a familiar octopus. The octopus was the one who always checked on Ark.

It would take out a cigarette butt and start complaining. He had encountered the octopus many times so Ark could recognize it at a glance. Its name was Burum. Ark couldn't understand what was going on and just looked around blankly. Burum sighted and faced Ark before muttering.

–Ark, I’m sorry.

“Huh?”

–But this is your fault. If only you hadn’t interfered.....

Burum turned a complex colour and shouted towards the octopuses in the room.

-Completely surround the human!

Dozens of octopuses flocked at Burum’s behest. Ark asked with a bewildered look as he was surrounded.

“What are you doing?”

-It can’t be helped. This is our only remaining hope. We can’t let you escape now that you’ve seen this. I’m sorry but you’re going to have to die.

Ark’s face distorted at Burum’s words. It must be a huge secret to kill him in order to keep it. If he was jumped by these number of octopuses then Ark without a dagger could only die. However, he never thought that he was in a crisis. The reason why.....

“You would kill to keep the secret?”

Ark declared sharply, causing Burum to wince and withdrew a little bit. But Burum nodded with determination.

–That’s right.

“Is your head just a decoration?”

–D-decoration? What do you mean?

“I’ll explain it simply. R-14 has the fairy revival system.”

–F-fairy!

Burum burst out with astonishment. This was why he called the octopuses stupid. Just like Ark said, R-14 had the Fairy revival system. If Ark was killed then he would just be resurrected through Fairy. It was impossible to keep their secret by killing him.

-U-unbelievable!

Burum finally realized the situation and flopped down on the ground.

-We're finished! Our last hope is gone!

Burum fell into a state of panic and rocked back and forth.

-Foreman-nim, it is a request! Please pretend you didn't see this! If the crew of R-14 is informed of this then we're screwed. For the future of the Charenjok, can you pretend not to have seen this?

"I don't even understand what is going on. But one thing is clear. You just tried to kill me. And now you want my help?"

-T-that....

"Right now I want to find out all your secrets. I believe that you had no other way. Thanks to our previous relationship, I've decided to given the Charenjok a chance. Explain to me the space bugs and what you are so desperate to hide that you tried to kill me. I'll listen and then decide."

-That is.....

Burum hesitated before sighing and confessing. The octopuses received even lower wages than Ark from cleaning the pipes and their allowance from the galactic federation was barely enough to

live off Space Food. Unless the policies suddenly changed, the octopuses circumstances wouldn't change even if decades passed. The octopuses were seriously worried about their future. After a lot of thinking, they finally figured out a way.

–We changed all the land we bought.

“Land you bought?”

–Yes, right now the federation is increasing the frontiers. Therefore there is a lot of land they deserted. In some cases, the land would be available for a cheap price. So we tried to buy it. But no matter how cheap it is, it is still real estate

The octopuses only received a low wage from cleaning the pipes! Thus the octopuses' balance was in the negatives.

Therefore Burum risked the fate of the octopuses on a gamble. When there was a small gap, Burum sneaked into R-14's laboratory and stole the egg of a space bug.

–The space bugs are used as cattle. The meat is used as an ingredient for Space Food and the leather used as materials for the space suits.

Ark was wearing clothes and eating food made from a space bug. They were incredibly cheap.

–The space bugs modified by the laboratory grow many times faster than normal space bugs. If we raise the space bugs in the area between the interior wall and R-14's barrier and sell the leather and meat then we can prepare more funds. But.....

The octopuses had forgotten an important fact. The space bugs were originally monsters. They were raised as livestock so they

weren't aggressive but the space bugs attacked once someone tried to peel the leather and meat from them. It was hard enough for a user to fight by themselves. Meanwhile, the octopuses had almost no weapons or combat ability. Dozens of them were required to catch just one space bug. Thus the space bugs steadily multiplied and eventually filled this huge space.

‘All my questions are answered.’

The sound Ark heard resounding through the pipes was the octopuses fighting the space bugs. The octopuses had been motivated. They raised the space bugs with the expectation of huge profit but it was impossible to feel motivated once the situation turned out like this.

–If we get caught then the space bugs will be confiscated and we'll be expelled from R-14. If we're kicked out into the universe in this state then it won't be possible for us to live. We had to keep it a secret, even if it meant killing you. Sob sob sob! It couldn't be helped!

Burum murmured in a regretful voice.

–Daddy?

Then he heard a voice from behind him. He looked back and saw a small octopus crawling out of a jar.

–Daddy, why are you crying? Are you hurt somewhere?

–Did another space bug injure you?

–I don't need to eat a lot of rice. It is hard so you don't need to catch the bugs.

–Yes, living here is fine. It is hard but we’re learning eagerly.

–Ack! I-It is nothing. I’m fine.

Burum wrapped its legs around its children and looked at Ark.

–Foreman-nim, please! I was blinded by the thought of profit and tried to kill you. I don’t care what will happen to me. But these children.....I can’t make these children spend a lifetime cleaning pipes.Can you pretend you didn’t see anything? I’m sorry for trying to kill you. I’ll devote my life to you so please.

It was indeed an emotional scene. If only they weren’t octopuses.

“I understand. I won’t tell the crew of R-14 about this.”

Ark watched Burum and the children for a bit before nodding. Burum’s eyes popped out after hearing Ark’s words.

–R-really?

Of course. This wasn’t a melodrama but he felt sympathy towards the octopuses. No, he was creeped out by the adult octopuses but he felt sorry for the child octopuses. Anyway, money wasn’t involved so there was no reason to pour cold water on the futures of the young octopuses. However, there was a decisive reason. Ark would also benefit from this.

‘There are a lot of space bugs in this farm!’

Ark drooled at the sight of all the bugs. It had been a week since Galaxian opened and since Ark started cleaning the pipes. In the meantime, the number of unemployed users in R-14’s hunting grounds gradually grew. At this rate, this state would be maintained for at least two months. This might just be cleaning

the pipes but Ark had found a job to escape the unemployment after his dagger broke.

‘But here my prey is overflowing!’

The octopuses couldn’t control the multiplication of the space bugs. Ark would have no limits if he hunted here. In other words, this was a free hunting ground that only Ark knew about! He could hunt anytime he wanted. There was no reason to tell the crew members.

‘Now I just have to receive permission to hunt here from Burum.....’

Ark was about to speak when he flinched and suddenly closed his mouth. He thought for a moment before sighing and shaking his head.

‘No. That’s not it. Ark, you still have a long way to go!’

Ark was naive after staying in the pipes for a week! His stomach was full so he lost his original intention of gaining even more food. Ark thought that he had regained some of his original mindset. However, Ark soon realized he was mistaken.

It wasn’t like that. The previous Ark wouldn’t have approached this situation like that. If it was the previous Ark.....

“I have a request.”

He would’ve said.

The economic principle was simple. Supply and demand. If he used supply and demand then he could get a profit. Ark’s brain concentrated on that concept.

–Invite in the pioneers?

“Yes. Burum-nim lives here so you won’t know that well but recently a lot of beginner pioneers have entered the universe. So many people flocked to the farm area that it isn’t possible to see the space bugs at all. The users entering this place will pay an admission fee to hunt the space bugs.”

–We get paid for letting them hunt space bus?

Burum scratched his head.

–Why would they pay money to hunt the space bugs here?

It was difficult to understand for an NPC. However, the users waiting at the farms were unemployed. They didn’t accept Bhurad’s <Space Bug Processing> quest because of money. Compensation was compensation but 90% of it was for the experience. This was all in order to reach level 10 and escape from the beginner areas. However, R-14’s only hunting ground was saturated with players! Even if they played Galaxian in their spare time, it wasn’t possible to find a hunting spot. Some people sat and waited but others just quit. A hunting ground full of monsters was the dream for such users!

They would be eager to enter even if they had to pay money. This is the principle of supply and demand!

‘Devising something like this.....’

It was something that the previous Ark would’ve come up with. Ark realized it again. He still hadn’t completely regained his hungry spirit. But once he realized this point, his head instantly started moving. Ark began devising a concrete business plan.

“First we must specific the customer base.”

–Customer base? We’re not just bringing anyone?

“Yes, we can’t just bring any pioneer here.”

Ark was thinking that the main customers should be users level 7~8. There were two reasons for this. Once again, R-14 was saturated so it was difficult to find a hunting spot. If users occupied a spot then they could reach level 10 if they stayed up all night. If the users were level 7~8 in that situation then the answer was obvious.

‘They are people who can’t always play the game because of work or other issues.’

Those people would be eager for experience. However, the level 7~8 users were employed less than level 1 users. Their level was high so they would eat more experience in a hunting party. That’s why existing parties only bothered with hiring level 1 users. So 90% of the level 7~8 users were unemployed. Despite the penalty, the workers had no choice but to connect in the evening when there were lots of people playing.

“But there is something more important than that. The users entering R-14 don’t have money. In the meantime, the level 7~8 users have hunted quite a lot. They must’ve completed Bhurad’s mission at least a dozen times.”

That was the second reason. The amount of hunting fee. Ark immediately started doing some market research. He had decided the main customers so he started doing research on how much money they would have.

‘Completing the <Space Bug Processing> quest once gives 10 silver. If they completed it through the leather and meat process then they will receive 20 silver. They should’ve completed the quest at least 10 times to reach level 7~8. Even if they spent some money on food and repairs, they should still have at least 1 gold.’

Thus he decided to charge 50 silver as the fee.

“How is it? Do you like the offer?”

“O-of course.....”

“Huhuhu, I thought so. If you want to hunt then you only have to spend 50 silver.”

“But 50 silver is half of my entire fortune so it is slightly expensive.....”

The users complained when first hearing the fee. 50 silver was a huge amount of money in R-14. Then Ark quickly said.

“It isn’t expensive. Don’t you know? 50 silver is only big because this is the beginner area. It isn’t a huge amount of money once you start earnestly hunting on the frontiers. Don’t you know users are already selling 10 gold on the auction site? Isn’t it better to spend 50 silver to hunt properly for a few hours and then earn your money on the frontier? Frankly, I think it is better to hunt here for several hours even if I have to spend 1 gold. But you also need money for food and repairs so the cost is just 50 silver.”

“Indeed.”

The user nodded.

“Yes, then I’ll hunt here.”

“Thank you. Then I’ll take 1 gold for the moment.”

“Huh? 1 gold? Didn’t you tell me it was 50 silver just now?”

“Yes, the hunting fee is 50 silver. The remaining 50 silver is a deposit. I will return the deposit once you reach level 10 and leave R-14.”

Ark said with a smile. In fact, the problem Ark was most worried about when commercializing the hunting ground was security. The reason the octopuses tried to kill Ark was because this was illegal. If the crew learnt that the octopuses were secretly raising space bugs then everything would be seized. So Ark made sure that the customers received the <Cleaning R-14’s Air Circulation Pipes> from Cheksun. That’s why level 7~8 users were the main customers. Level 7 or higher users could hunt for 5 hours before reaching level 10. There was little danger of the level 10 users informing other users and the crew as they would immediately leave R-14. However, he couldn’t be reassured with just that.

‘In some cases, the users might feel vindictive and file a complaint!’

Ark didn’t believe in users. People were animals who could change their minds at any moment. It was a game so nothing more needed to be said. No user would feel guilty for killing someone. The deposit from users was a safety precaution. Ark would return the 50 silver once the users reached level 10 and were on the verge of leaving R-14.

‘This is to ensure that the hunting ground isn’t discovered but.....’

Thus Ark intentionally took a different complicated path every time he took them to the hunting ground. Even if they knew about the existence of the hunting ground, the users or NPCs wouldn't be able to find it. Soon the hunting ground would become an urban legend of R-14! He had placed a threefold security device!

‘Yes, this is sufficient.’

The business was successful. No, it was a business that had no choice but to succeed when considering R-14's job shortage. Ark went around for a few hours and gathered 20 users from sectors 1~5. He managed to collect 10 gold at once.

-Wow! U-unbelievable!

Burum trembled while looking at the 10 gold. The octopuses only received 20 copper when cleaning 200 metres of pipe. 10 gold for them was like cleaning 5,000 kilometres. Burum was giddy after seeing such a large amount of money.

-It is possible to gain money like this. T-then we should attract more pioneers.....

“That would be a problem.”

Ark declared firmly.

“It won't work. The marketability of this hunting ground is the amount of monsters. The proliferation of the bugs is slower than the users' hunting rate so 20 users is just right. If more users gather then the merit would fall. In addition, security will suffer if the number of users increases.”

If they ate too much then an accident was likely to occur.

Although greed was necessary for business, sometimes patience was required.

“This is a long-term business. If we continue to bring 20 users then the earnings will steadily increase. If you want to increase revenue then the only way is to increase the users’ hunting speed.”

–Increase the users’ hunting speed? What do you mean?

“Helping them level up faster.”

–Faster?

“Yes.”

Ark pointed towards the hunting grounds.

“Pant pant, I don’t have much health left. I’ll take it easy for a while.”

The users had hunted like crazy for a while so they started gasping and panting. The level 7 users had teamed up in groups of 5 and fought a few space bugs at once. It was different from sectors 1~5 as the users could rest if they lost a lot of health. Ark didn’t like that. They needed to quickly get to level 10 so he could attract other customers. Ark quickly approached the resting users.

“You paid a high fee to enter so shouldn’t you increase your level a little faster?”

“But I don’t have much health left.”

“Then I’ll give you the recovery service.”

Ark winked and the octopuses suddenly swarmed. A few of them attached to 1 person and their health was quickly restored.

“Eh? Health recovery!”

“Huhuhu, this is a service for people using the paid hunting ground.”

Of course, this also wasn't free. He got one space bug leather and meat every time they used the service! Some users rejected it but they saw other users quickly raising their level and eventually gave in to the service system. Even if they collected 20 japtem and reported the quest, they could only receive 20 silver. It was better to give up some silver to raise their experience.

“Hunt quickly. You paid 50 silver for this hunting ground. Isn't it better to quickly reached level 10 so you can gather expensive loot on the frontier?”

Ark eagerly supported the users. If users were replaced quickly then it would further enrich Ark's wallet. The problem was the distributing of income between Ark and the octopuses. However, Ark had clearly clarified this issue before starting the business.

“I didn't tell the crew and I only thought of the business plan so I want all of the income.”

Dudong!

The octopuses' eyes popped out at Ark's words.

–Isn't that just like having the space bugs confiscated?

–What about us? What about our future?

“It is only until I leave R-14.”

Ark soothed the octopuses with those words.

“I will also leave this place once I gain sufficient experience. Of

course I will teach you everything you need to know to operate the hunting ground. The Charenjok can get a steady income for a few months.”

Even if Ark was earning income, he couldn't stay in R-14 forever. Once he left for the frontiers then he couldn't return. Therefore he had to be satisfied with monopolizing the income while he was at R-14. The octopuses obediently accepted Ark's proposal. No, they lifted their 8 tentacles and made him welcome. Ark had caught their weak point so they had no choice but to accept. He made it clear he would only obtain the income until he left R-14. So he earned 10 gold in one day.

‘Now I can buy a few Modified Alloy Daggers.....’

Ark shook his head and pushed down his impatience.

‘I didn't clean the pipes simply to make money. It is a process to recover my original mindset. I can't give that up just because I earned some money. There is the paid hunting ground so I can level up any time I want. At first I just cleaned the pipes to earn money to buy a dagger. I saved 283 mileage points after switching to that method. I only need to complete it 100 more times to earn the dagger so that is 2 days remaining!’

Tighten and oil....scrub....tighten and oil.....

Despite Ark's purse becoming thick, Ark didn't stop cleaning. Ark couldn't imagine stopping his pride training.

-Ark, come see me for a bit.

It happened when he completed 300 mileage. He received Cheksun's call from the Nymphe and went to find him.

“I’m sorry but I have to let you go today.”

“Huh? What do you mean.....?”

Ark thought the hunting ground had been discovered and his heart dropped.

“Like I said before, the budget is small thanks to the Charenjok. You’ve saved quite a few mileage so any more would be wasteful expenses for the budget. That’s why I wanted to talk to you.....I have to let you go. I’m sorry.”

‘There is also a limit to repeatable quests.’

He had set his sights on wiping the pipes until he earned enough to buy a dagger. He was reluctant to leave his work one day earlier but it was still valuable. But Ark miscalculated.

“Here it is. You’ve earned 1 gold and 55 silver for you maintenance work.”

“Huh? 1 gold 55 silver?”

“Yes, your contract was 40 copper and you gained 80 silver from the 200 mileage. You also completed it 100 times after becoming Cleaning Foreman so that is 60 silver. The bonus mileage is 15 copper. That is 1 gold and 55 silver.”

‘That’s right! Isn’t this quest made so someone could recover their lost dagger? Then they should earn the value of a dagger by the end. I didn’t calculate the mileage bonus so I added extra time.’

In the end, Ark had achieved his goal. He settled the other problem and he didn’t need to worry about the quest anymore.

“Thank you. But I’ve become familiar with the Charenjok in the

meantime. Can I often come here?”

“Of course. You’re always welcome.”

Ark received a definite answer and headed towards the store.

“Wait a moment.”

Cheksun called out to Ark.

“To be honest, this isn’t only due to the instructions from above. You didn’t seem like you were going to quit so I wanted to make you stop.”

“Huh? What does that mean.....?”

“You were in a tough situation after first entering the universe and ended up cleaning the facilities. I was also like that. When I first entered space, I had the thought of engraving my name in history. But the universe was tougher than I thought. Not anyone can succeed as a pioneer. In the end I gave up on my dream but you are still young. Yes, cleaning the pipes isn’t a place for someone like you.”

Cheksun looked at Ark.

“At first I ignored you. But I’ve been watching and you are different from other people. The universe is scary. Endless dangers exist in the universe. Any moment could break the will of a young pioneer. After seeing your hard work, I believe that you can get through any difficulties. I wish for your success so I’ve prepared a small gift.”

Cheksun handed him a toolbox.

Item type: Skill Supplement

The toolbox used by Cheksun, the manager of R-14's internal facilities maintenance. It is possible to repair simple facilities using this tool. However, the materials to repair the equipment is needed.

<Success rate of Facilities Maintenance increased by 20%>

* Possible to repair general items (Need Resources)

“This is a toolbox that I’ve used. It is old but comfortable to use. And I wrote a letter to some friends on the frontier. My friend Tori operates a company on the frontier so you can receive several favours if you show him my letter.”

Then an information window appeared from the Nymphe.

-<Sector 7 Manager Cheksun's Recommendation Letter>

You have worked patiently to clean the pipes at the space station. The sector 7 manager Cheksun appreciated your patient and handed a recommendation letter to his friend called Tori. Cheksun's old friend Tori will assist you if you show him the recommendation letter. Go see him quickly.

Difficulty: –

-You have received the quest item 'Cheksun's Letter of Recommendation.'

Ark wouldn't refuse it.

"Thank you."

Ark's face became animated. He never imagined this ending to the repeatable quest. But the value of the compensation received from Cheksun wasn't a problem. He repeated the quest 300 times! He cleaned 30 kilometres of pipes by the time the quest ended. The biggest reward was the increase to his confidence after seeing what he achieved. There was only one thing left to do!

"The dagger!"

Chaking!

The dagger soared from Ark's bag. He had completed the quest 300 times and managed to buy the Modified Alloy Dagger! Ark grabbed his dagger and plunged into the paid hunting ground.

"Let's go! Level up!"

Ark was a free ticket user.

Space 5: R-14's Master

SPACE 5. R-14's Master

-Your body has been restored through the revival system 'Fairy.'

The message window flashed in front of Ark. But he no longer paid attention to such messages.

“I don't know how many times I've seen this.”

Ark murmured as he checked his equipment. The Fairy was a revival system where the user was exactly restored to the state that they registered. Of course, this was limited to R-14 that was the beginner area but there was little damage when dying if the users registered. It meant there was no need to fear death. Therefore he could try everything.

“If there is no death penalty.....”

It was possible to train skills that appeared through death. Back in New World, Ark learnt the Indomitable Will skill because he died so much. There also might be a similar skill in Galaxian. And the only time to try it out was on R-14 where there was no death penalty!

-Since it is a free service, a lot of pioneers play tricks and die.

Bhurad said the first time Ark revived with the Fairy. They also seemed to be thinking like Ark. This was a death penalty free area so there was a chance of obtaining a hidden skill. Ark's autobiography had stated that Ark learnt a hidden skill through

this area.

‘Virtual reality games aren’t that easy for the users these days.’

He had to prepare himself. So Ark spent an entire day dying. Thanks to that, he figured out hidden information about the Fairy revival system.....

-You have received the ‘aftereffect’ caused by frequent revivals.

The Fairy is a system that perfectly recycles the registered body. But frequent revivals placed a considerable burden on the spirit. In the worst case scenario, it will lead to mental damage. A proper rest is needed for recovery.

<For 6 hours, all stats -50% and the stats will be permanently lost if you die again under the ‘aftereffect’ status>

He couldn’t acquire any skills through dying. Ark confirmed the ‘aftereffect’ message and stop trying to obtain a death related skill. However, Ark wasn’t disappointed.

‘I found out about this penalty so it isn’t a waste of time.’

It was still the beginning stages of a game. Even information that seemed boring was valuable. It might’ve seemed like a reckless attempt but it also brought something good.

–Hey, are you okay?

Burum asked anxiously after the 20th time he died.

–It is impossible by yourself so shouldn't you try to fight with the other pioneers?

The NPCs couldn't understand that Ark was intentionally trying to die.

“No. I'm fine on my own. This place is safe but who knows what type of dangers there will be once I leave R-14. There is no doubt that I'll encounter risky moments. I can't possible ask for somebody's help every time while I'm travelling.”

–You're not wrong but.....

Burum scratched his head with hesitation. He worried a while before proposing.

-Then do you want to learn a technique of the Charenjok?

“Huh? A technique of the Charenjok?”

–I noticed that humans seem to have a little trouble moving on mud. Is that right?

In fact, that was the part that irritated Ark the most. Even if Ark wanted to die, it was no use if the space bugs just chewed on him. He wanted to practice various battle techniques before dying. He had no skills and had to rely on basic offense and defense. Attacking was no problem but he had trouble with defending. His ankle would often get stuck in the mud and would cause him to fall. The mud floor of the paid hunting ground was the area where the Charenjok lived. It was easy for them because they were octopuses but Ark wasn't an alien. His movements were so dull on the mud that it was difficult for him to even move. He had no chance to use evasive movements. The other users were hunting in

groups of 5 so the mud wasn't a problem for them. Ignore defense!
Ignore evasion!

Why would they have any problems when they just stood there and attacked? But Ark was hunting alone so he needed maneuverability. Burum thought that was the reason why Ark continued to die.

–A muddy ground is the best environment for the Charenjok. It is how the Charenjok were able to survive many brutal monsters. There are hardly any monsters able to catch up to us when travelling on mud. I can teach you this technique.

‘A skill from an NPC!’

Ark immediately nodded and accepted the offer.

“Yes, I’ll sincerely learn it!”

–Huhuhu, yes. Because you are just like the Charenjok’s benefactor.

Burum chose a location.

–Now, please follow me. First spread your legs like this and.....

His 8 legs started quivering and moving.

‘.....Is this a joke?’

How could Ark move like that when he didn't have 8 legs? However, Ark swallowed the words which rose in his throat and followed Burum's instructions. This was a technique that the NPC offered first.

There definitely had to be a way to learn it. Once he set a goal, he recklessly dashed towards it! Ark rolled in the mud and desperately

did the training. Burum also enthusiastically taught him.

–Not like that! Relax a bit more! Like suk suk!

There was a reason Burum was so desperate. The octopuses could only collect the income from the hunting ground once Ark left R-14. Therefore the octopuses wanted Ark to level up quickly so he could leave R-14. Ark managed to master the skill thanks to such passion.

‘The main point isn’t using 8 legs. The important thing is how evenly I can distribute my weight. It is the same principle as someone with super strength picking up an egg. Remove the unnecessary power and disperse the weight.’

It was the secret to balancing in mud!

-A new skill (Common Occupation ☆ ☆) has been learnt.

Swamp Walking (User, Passive): Not all environments on the frontier of space are suitable for humans. Therefore it is important that pioneers can adapt to harsh environments. The faster method is to learn from the local aliens. You have learnt Swamp Walking from the Charenjok.

<The restrictions in the swamp has decreased and the evasion rate has increased by 10%>

He learnt the skill once he reached enlightenment.

‘A two star rated skill!’

He learnt that the stars attached to the skill would change according to the degree of difficulty or importance. Needless to say, a two star skill was more difficult to learn and important than a one star skill. His movements quickly changed after learning Swamp Walking. He hadn't been able to do any evasive actions until now. It didn't matter even if he grasped the timing of attacks. However, he now managed to sometimes succeed in an evasive action and the damage diminished. He finally started a full scale battle after days spent cleaning the pipes.

“Now, let's see.....”

The pipe cleaning quest also gave experience. But the experience was tiny and he only reached level 3 despite clearing it 300 times. His agility increased by 3 thanks to the Cleaning Foreman title bonus and his evasion also increased due to Swamp Walking. The Alloy Dagger had an attack of 3~4 while the Modified Alloy Dagger dealt 5~6 damage. The difference was only 1 damage but it couldn't be ignored.

“This much should be sufficient to try it alone!”

The level of the space worms was 4~7. He was able to distinguish between the levels thanks to the size. The smallest were level 4 while the largest ones with black fur were level 7. It was different from the insufficient farm area and he could afford to choose his prey. And despite the monsters being everywhere, they weren't aggressive so he could attack them first. This was a suitable advantage for the level 3 Ark.

‘Let's start with the level 4 space bugs.’

Seokeok!

The space bug turned its round body after being pierced by the dagger. His stats were low. He also didn't have any skills so he had no choice but to fight tediously. At first the monotony was extremely painful but he soon changed his mind.

‘I have to get used to this monotony.’

The users could exert more power in a virtual reality game than in reality. A person who was in a wheelchair in reality could run around and fly in the game. And even a child could fight against a large monster. This was the charm of a virtual reality game! But that power had to be supported by stats. If the user had low stats then that would actually be a penalty towards their actual physical abilities. It was the reason why Ark was lost in the earlier battles. Ark had misunderstood his power thanks to his previous character.

‘I have to reset myself.’

He wasn't the strongest warrior but a level 3 character. That's why he had recklessly ran forward when he first hunted in a party. Now he could accurately measure his power.

‘Hit, to the right, I have to carve every step into my body!’

Kuoooooh!

He finished killing the space bug and it collapsed. He had 15% health left so it was possible for him to hunt level 4 space bugs.

‘It has been 10 days since I've started Galaxian and I've finally caught a monster by myself.’

He felt a lot of emotions after catching the space bug. And there was something even more inspiring.

-Ohh! Ark finally defeated a space bug!

-There's no time!

-Recovery! Recovery!

-We have to heal him quickly so that Ark can hunt faster!

The octopuses cheered and thronged towards him. Ark had 10 octopuses clinging to him, which was a lot more compared to the other users! Ark had finally killed something after dying so many times. Thanks to the desperate octopuses, his 100 health was restored in seconds.

-Fighting!

-We're rooting for Ark-nim!

He even received sincere cheers.

“What is with that guy? He brought us to the paid hunting ground.....isn't that VIP treatment?”

The users didn't know the situation and just looked at Ark with confusion. But Ark didn't care about the interest of the players. Ark's only concern was fighting! Ark became immersed in battle with no breaks. Fighting, being restored by the octopuses, fighting, being restored.....

-Your level has risen.

His level immediately increased after repeated battles. After 2~3 hours, Ark reached level 5 and added bonus stats to agility.

‘Now I can roughly sense it.’

Ark started moving more boldly.

Bam-!

He kicked the space bug right in the chest. Ark specialty of taekwondo kicks had finally started.

In fact, kicking wasn't a special skill in virtual reality games. Once Ark's success was well known, the users started to imitate him. He had seen many users hunting with crude kicks in the 2nd sector. However, they couldn't be compared to Ark's kicks. They weren't the original. Ark had training and his standards were different from other users. Well, he was still only level 5.....

‘Damn, my kick didn't connect?’

It did 0 damage. That meant it wasn't regarded as an attack. However, it wasn't completely pointless. The space bug flinched and retreated a little bit at the kick. There might not be any damage but the laws of physics still applied.

‘I don't know if my level is too low to learn the relevant skill or Galaxian might not acknowledge kicks. But there is a reaction so it wasn't hopeless. Even if there is no damage, there are endless ways to utilize the secondary effects.’

It was a correct judgment. Fighting became much easier once he started mixing in kicks.

The 10 octopuses recovered his health after each battle and his fighting speed accelerated. Therefore he reached level 6 in 2 hours! At the same time, the previous ‘Space Combat’ skill was regained and he learnt the basic combat skill ‘Dagger Mastery’ when he

reached level 7.

-A new skill (Common Occupation ☆) has been learnt.

Dagger Mastery (User, Passive): This is the skill that most pioneers learn first in Galaxian. The dagger is the most traditional and the most utilized from a wide range of weapons. Dagger Master will be the foundation of a large number of weapon techniques you will learn from now on.

<Additional 3% damage will be granted to the dagger>

As expected from the early stages of the game! Once he made up his mind then his level and skills rose quickly. The growth of the character depended on the user's will! After learning Dagger Mastery and Space Combat, Ark started hunting the strongest monsters in the area which were the level 7 space bugs. Thanks to the various bonus stats and skills, fighting higher levelled monsters normally wasn't a problem for him. But catching monsters in the early stages were more difficult. Ark was the same as well. Even if he learnt Space Combat and Dagger Mastery, they were still common skills that other users learnt. If the other users learnt such basic skills then there was no reason why they couldn't face the space bugs. However, Ark had one skill that the other users couldn't easily learn.

‘Swamp Walking!’

It increased evasion by 10%! It was a huge bonus for someone with 100 health.

“Take this you stupid slugs!”

It was an explosion of kicks followed by the dagger attack!

Kuoooooh!

At the end of a 10 minute struggle, even the strongest level 7 space bug collapsed. It was only difficult the first time. He grew used to hunting the space bugs so they didn't feel that difficult afterwards. Moreover, Ark always started the battle with 100% health thanks to the octopuses. It was indeed the best hunting environment. However, Ark wasn't in a position where he could just hunt. If a user reached level 10 then their deposit would be returned to them and they would move onto the next area. And Ark had to gather new users from the farm area. That consumed quite a bit of Ark's time but he didn't regret it. Making money was just as important as levelling up.

‘I should reduce the time needed for sleep!’

His previous mindset had been revived. So he spent 3 days hunting and acquiring customers.

-Your level has risen.

‘Finally.....!’

Ark's body was filled with excitement as he saw the message window. He finally reached level 10! He could leave R-14. The octopuses were even more excited than Ark.

-Oh! You finally have the qualifications to become a pioneer!

-Halo! It's like a halo is shining around you!

The octopuses gathered and clamoured away. The paid hunting ground had opened for 4 days so they were thrilled they could get custody of it back. However, Ark immediately betrayed the expectations of the octopuses.

Seokeok! Seokeok!

He just closed the information window without talking and became immersed in hunting again. The octopuses were at a loss from Ark's action and murmured.

-W-what is that friend doing?

-Does he not know that he can leave R-14 now?

-No, that is impossible. Every pioneer should know about it.

-Then why is he still hunting?

-Perhaps.....he intends to stay here and get all our income?

-W-what? T-then? What about us?

The octopuses started panicking. So the octopuses gathered around Ark and incited him to leave.

-Don't you think you've become strong enough?

-Yes, you'll be able to chew any monsters on the frontier.

-Of course you have to give up the income from the hunting ground to discover the unexplored regions.

-But the frontier is a land of gold and opportunity for pioneers. Someone smart, strong and filled with desire like you.....no, a pioneer with strong desire can earn money that can't even be

compared with the income from this hunting ground. We guarantee it.

The octopuses didn't want to give the impression that they weren't grateful. But Ark also had the same idea as the octopuses. The average daily income for the paid hunting ground was 7~8 gold. When considering that the average income of level 10 users who left R-14 was 2 gold, that was a huge amount. But this was because it was the beginner area. Once he entered the frontier and the game earnestly started then that amount would be nothing. Common sense indicated that reaching higher levels meant more income. 7~8 gold would be nothing once he raised his level. His previous character Ark had earned thousands of gold in one day. Furthermore, he didn't gain that much experience once he reached level 10. He was only hunting level 7 monsters. There was a difference of 3 levels so a penalty was applied on how much experience he could earn. And the monsters weren't a sufficient opponent to practice his fighting skills anymore. He would be wasting time if he stayed in this hunting ground.

‘I know that but.....’

He had ignored the octopuses and continued killing the space bugs. Ark's target was to regain his mindset. So another three days passed. He suddenly heard Bhurad's voice from the Nymphe.

-Ark, come and see me.

‘That's it!’

Ark quickly ran towards the central plaza.

“Did you call?”

“Ark, that is.....”

Bhurad looked at him with significantly different eyes before continuing.

“In fact, I really thought you were a hopeless person the first time I saw you. You broke your dagger and you also couldn’t report your work. Yet I can see that you have a bright future ahead. You continued receiving a small salary and eventually obtained a dagger again. Now I can’t help but feel admiration.”

“You’re overpraising me.”

“No, no. I’m not the type of person to say empty words.”

Bhurad examined his Nymph and said.

“Your recovery is startling but the amount of mileage you ended up recording is even more astonishing. You reserved 56 mileage from hunting the space bugs. You also recorded 144 mileage from bringing in meat and leather from the space bugs. This is the best record among all the pioneers on R-14. No, it is the highest recorded among all the pioneers scattered on the space station around Earth. How on earth did you accumulate that much mileage?”

It was hard work. There was a chance that the user could die when recording mileage for the space bug hunting. The amount of quests the users normally completed by the time they reached level 10 was 25~30. However, Ark had reserved 56 mileage through the paid hunting ground. His leather and meat was also approximately three times that mileage. It was incredible when thinking about the low drop rate from the space bugs. However, Ark actually

found getting the leather and meat to be easy. The guests of the hunting ground paid for the octopuses' recover service through leather and meat. That also went into Ark's pocket. If the customers also gave all the meat and leather they found then Ark would lower the fee to 30 silver. All of this was for one goal.

“No, it doesn't matter how you gained that much mileage. The result says it all. Anyway, I admire your will. I honestly didn't expect much from the novices entering the universe but you are different. So I prepared a present for you.”

Bhurad handed him something for his wrist.

-Bhurad's Shield (Magic)

Item Type: Energy Shield

Wearer Restriction: Level 10

Defense: 25

Durability: 30/30

Shield Quantity: 1,000

1,000

A special reward given by Bhurad, the manager of R-14's training centre to the pioneer who raised the most mileage. The energy shield is a common defense item in the space pioneering age that helps protect the body from various dangers. The shield will be destroyed after several attacks from the enemy but the equipped battery will automatically repair the shield after a certain period of time.

<Option: Strength +3, Stamina +3>

“This is a shield that I took care of for a long time. It is quite old but it should be sufficient for a beginner pioneer to use. And I’ve also written you a letter of recommendation for the galactic federation. The galactic federation is always looking for talent like you. If you would like to work for the federation then show them this letter of recommendation. I’ll tell you beforehand but this isn’t given to everyone. I won’t explain it now but this is a considerable privilege that you will soon understand.”

Then an information window appeared from the Nymph.

<R-14 training centre manager Bhurad’s letter of recommendation>

You’ve should incredible talent compared to most pioneers that pass through R-14. The training centre manager Bhurad appreciated your patience and qualities and wrote you a letter of recommendation to the federal government. If you make someone from the federal government a sponsor then it is possible to receive considerable benefits.

Difficulty: –

-You have received the quest item ‘Bhurad’s Letter of Recommendation.’

‘I did it!’

At first he thought that Bhurad’s quest would be infinitely repeated. However, the repeatable quest <Cleaning R-14’s Air Circulation Pipes> had a limit and ended. Then wouldn’t it be the

same for the <Space Bug Processing> quest? That's why Ark continued hunting despite reaching level 10.

‘I will get an achievement if I reach the end!’

Cheksun gave him items once he reached the end of the quest. If the same thing was applied then Bhurad might also give him an item. Ark's guess was correct. Bhurad's Shield! It was rare to receive a magic item in the beginner areas. Furthermore, he also received a recommendation related quest!

‘Well, I have to find out a bit more information about it.....’

But that wasn't the end. Ark took the item and organized his bags. Now he could relax and leave R-14. Ark paid one last visit to the paid hunting ground to finish up the business.

–A-Ark!

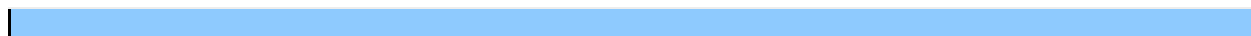
The octopuses who had been gathered tightly together stared at him with surprise. They exchanged looks and Burum slowly approached him.

–Ark, we've been thinking and we realized that we were too short-sighted.

“Huh? Too short-sighted?”

–You really were a big help to us. You helped us establish an independent business after we tried to kill you. We're embarrassed about how we treated you when you're going to be leaving soon. So we made up our mind after a meeting. We decided that we should show our sincerity.

Burum extended something that looked like a small octopus.



Item type: Recovery

A mascot loved by the Charenjok. If you attach this mascot then you will recover from poison and your health will recover for 10 minutes.

<Recovery from poison, your health will recover by 1 every 3 seconds for 10 minutes>

This was why the octopuses were consulting each other. It was to decide what they should give Ark as thanks.

‘Aha!’

An ‘!’ appeared in his head. He remembered something that he forgot thanks to the behaviour of the octopuses. Once something broken then everything would come out. Ark realized that while playing the previous game. He had polished the pipes with the octopuses and their sincerity towards Ark increased due to the business plan.

–This might be useless for humans. Isn’t it beautiful? It will be able to sooth you if you feel upset. But this is all we have right now. Please think of us and take it. And.....this isn’t a demand. You’ll beheading to the frontier so can you give us our dream now?

“I understand.”

–Ohh! Really? You’ll really give it to us?

The octopuses danced with joy as they received the answer they

were waiting for. Ark taught the octopuses how to acquire customers and the knowledge to make the business successful.

–Phew, he should go now. That terrible guy.

The octopuses muttered after they were handed the business documents. Ark heard it through the pipes but he didn’t question it. The NPCs had given Ark an item so he couldn’t afford to be generous.

Anyway, Ark meticulously checked that everything in R-14 was finished and headed towards the exit.

It was a place filled with users who reached level 10. Ark was already familiar with the procedure and entered an elevator in the centre of R-14.

-Ark, the body scan has begun.

There was a mechanical sound and the information window appeared from the Nymph.

| Character information window | | | |
|---|---------------|--------------|------------------|
| Name | Ark (R-02788) | Level | 15 |
| Species | Human | Occupation | Beginner Pioneer |
| Fame | – | | |
| Health | 300 (+15) | Mental Power | 150 |
| Strength | 55 (+3) | Agility | 75 |
| Stamina | 55 (+3) | Wisdom | 15 |
| Intelligence | 25 | Luck | 15 |
| * Title: Cleaning Foreman (Agility + 3) | | | |

Ark had reached level 15 by the time he left R-14! It was an

unprecedented record for R-14. Once the authentication procedure ended, the elevator closed and shot upwards. Another door opened and the universe expanded in front of him. It was a huge dome shaped area covered in a 3D map of the universe. One planet lit up when he entered. At the same time, the Nymphe vibrated and information appeared.

-You have accessed the Star Gate system.

Currently dozens of frontiers exist in the present galactic federation. However, space travel using the warp system is impossible to withstand for pioneers who haven't received the body coating. These are the places where the pioneers can move to from the R-14 Star Gate. Istana is a planet located on the outskirts of the Milky Way galaxy and is approximately 2.5 times Earth's size. It is the centre of humanity's current exploration.

Unlike other settlements that are close to being barren, Istana has conditions suitable for humans to live in. Therefore Istana is the place where most pioneers are active and it currently leading the space development. It also contains a number of companies, including the headquarters of the galactic federation.

In order to receive a body coating, the support of a company or the galactic federation is required. Therefore, you must first be recognized by Istana and find a sponsor before you can head to the frontiers. As

a pioneer, you can ask a company with huge financial capital or a company with amazing technology to sponsor you. The future is bright.

The planet of Istana expanded and red dots appeared. They were the different regions of Istana that he could select as a starting point.

-Tatuine-

The area where the headquarters of the galactic federation is located. It is the largest city on Istana.

Population Density: ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Civilization: ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

■

Advanced Sponsor: ■ ■ ■ ■ □

-Kurim-

Except for Tatuine, this is the commercial city with the most companies. Abundant space resources are scattered around the area and it is a commercially profitable city. Aside from the 4 main companies that are leading the space development, there are various small companies so it is easy to find a sponsor.

Population Density: ■ ■ ■ ■ □ Civilization: ■ ■ ■ ■ □

Advanced Sponsor: ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Approximately 20 cities were displayed. Selecting the starting point was an important choice. Ark meticulously read through the information about the cities one by one. He searched for a while and found a city that met all his criteria.

“Activate Star Gate, destination is Nephalim!”

The whole area vibrated and light gathered. Ark turned into a ray of light and shot out of R-14. The light was launching towards Istana, the centre of pioneering.

“What? What’s going on?”

Shortly after Ark flew towards Istana. The users were noisily gathered in R-14’s central plaza. It was because of the message that appeared on all monitors.

-Achievement: The first mission related master of R-14 has been born. <Ark>

“R-14’s Master? What does that mean?”

“Isn’t this just a place to reach level 10 before leaving for the frontier?”

“Every quest is just a repeatable quest. How does someone become a mission related master?”

“Is there a hidden ques we don’t know about?”

The users endless speculated. But they were even more interested in the name of R-14’s Master. Ark!

“Ark.....”

“Surely it isn’t that ‘Ark’?”

“Of course not. Why would the hero of New World start a new game?”

“That name is popular in Galaxian so we don’t know if that is the real Ark.....”

“Is the real Ark in Galaxian?”

The users looked at the monitor dubiously. Then they scanned the surroundings with bright eyes.

“It doesn’t matter if he is the real Ark. Clearly there is a quest we don’t know about in R-14!”

“Find it! We have to occupy the spot before others find it first!”

The players swarmed like flies all over the place.

Gumul gumul, gumul gumul.

An octopus wearing tattered gear moved through the users.

–Huhuhu, Ark is gone so we can finally get some funds!

It was Burum who was full of dreams and looking for new customers.

Space 6: Welcome to Nephalim (Part: 1)

SPACE 6. Welcome to Nephalim (PART: 1)

“I don’t know if this will turn out well.”

Yoo Han-pil sighed and murmured. He was the chairman of a huge company and any Korean citizen would know his name. This was the first time he had been so frustrated in the 50 years he had been born. More than a year ago.....

He only had one son. He was the only son of a 3rd generation financial group so naturally he raised his son in a prison of gold. And his son grew into a great young man. His head was good so he entered a top university and his physical skills meant he could play any sport. His appearance was also at the level of a celebrity. He was indeed perfect so it was expected that he would inherit! Yoo Han-pil had no doubt about the future of his son. But that bright future turned to grey after the incident that occurred more than a year ago.

‘If it wasn’t for that.....’

Yoo Han-pil stared at his son with a gloomy expression. The young man was sitting in a wheel chair.

His head tilted to the side and his hands and feet were twisted and didn’t lie properly. His perfect son now couldn’t even move his hand properly to eat some rice. Although he had improved a lot.

After the unexpected accident, his son had been unconscious for several months. Even if his son was disabled overnight, he was

thankful that he even woke up. Of course, the thing he desired most was for his son to return to normal. And he would do anything to help his son's recovery. Even if it meant offering his entire fortune!

‘My mind hasn’t changed. But.....’

Yoo Han-pil looked at the machine behind his son. It was the unit for the virtual reality game Galaxian. He asked the family doctor. There were many cases where people in similar conditions to his son were immersed in a virtual reality game and improved a lot. Yoo Han-pil already knew that. However, he didn’t want to use a virtual reality game to treat his son. His son’s accident was related to a virtual reality game. Naturally his son didn’t play the virtual reality game after that. But a few days ago, his son suddenly said that he wanted to play the virtual reality game Galaxian. The old nightmare resurfaced and he flatly refused. However his son didn’t give up. He wouldn’t even eat unless he was allowed to play Galaxian. In the end, Yoo Han-pil had no choice but to give in.

“Is it really okay?”

“Yes.....”

His son painfully moved his lips. Yoo Han-pil sighed and nodded.

“Okay, if that is your will then I won’t stop you anymore. I also won’t ask why you suddenly want to play Galaxian. I only have one wish. I don’t want you to return to your previous state. A virtual reality is perfect for disabled people so I hope you can live a normal life in there. Just promise me one thing. Don’t tear your father’s heart again like you did a year ago.”

“You don’t have to worry..... Already....that case.....something reckless like that.....I won’t do it. I just.....”

“That’s fine.”

Yoo Han-pil nodded his head.

“That is enough.”

He placed his son within the Galaxian unit. The unit was closed. And his son headed towards a universe set in the far future.

The humans in the 22nd century didn’t have a lot of choices. The century changed and quickly accelerated the ruin that humans caused to the earth. Thus the world wide government launched a huge project for the sake of humanity. The universe was still unknown to humans but they decided to place humanity’s fate on exploring it. After numerous trials and 30 years, humanity finally completed a moon base. Once the moon base was completed, their space development technology accelerated. In the end, the 24th century became the space pioneering age. Humanity repeated their tremendous growth and opened one solar system planet after another. After many decades, humans finally managed to develop warp navigated and extended their explorations beyond the Milky Way galaxy. They changed their name to the galactic federation and humanity’s space fleet spread across the galaxies. That was when the problems occurred.

Humanity had entered the real space pioneering age and experienced some things on the frontier that they never imagined. Hundreds of thousands of light years away in the Kiltin

constellation, they encountered an aggressive warrior alien species called the Rama! They were armed with strong physical abilities and advanced technology beyond humanity. The dreams of the first pioneers that advanced into the galaxies turned to dust. And their solar system ended up being threatened. A team operation! The genius scientist Lucian gathered a team of humanity's top scientists. After decades of research, the humans finally developed a technology that could withstand the Rama.

That was body coating! It was a technology that changed humans into aliens. For the first time, mankind could counterattack against the Rama threatening the solar system. They allied with other aliens also threatened by the Rama and ended the first space war. However, that peace didn't last. The 1st Space War was just the beginning of humanity's trials. Numerous risks existed beyond human wisdom and many ancient alien civilizations disappeared as their stars went out. There was a chance that humanity could also be buried by darkness. This was humanity's history written down in the history books.

–Humanity is just like a newborn baby leaving its cradle. From now on humanity will suffer numerous risks and setbacks. However, humanity is a species with infinite possibilities. Body coating is a technology that holds infinite possibilities. The important thing is human potential. If you can draw out all that potential then humans will be the rulers of the universe.

By Lucian Endoneid.

“This is Nephalim?”

Ark looked around with surprised eyes. The dome he arrived at wasn't that different from R-14's Star Gate. However, it became a completely different world once he left the dome. It was a citadel city surrounded by a huge, dense forest! Of course, he had played other virtual reality games so he wasn't that surprised. The city wasn't the capital of the kingdom yet it was dozens of times larger than Yeoido plaza. Yet there was no reason to be surprised by the city. It was the machinery scattered in different places that caught Ark's eye. Thick pipes were laid out all over the city and the machinery blew black smoke, while crude 3D billboards were attached to walls made of brick. It was like a crazy mix between medieval times and futuristic science. Well, the background was set in a future age.

“Here....is this really Nephalim?”

Ark searched the information about Nephalim on his Nymphe.

-Nephalim-

Apart from Tatuine, this was the city where most companies swarmed after Istana was discovered. Nephalim is surrounded by unique natural environments so many unique space resources have been found. However, it fell behind thanks to the disadvantageous terrain and the population decreased as many people moved to other areas. This city isn't recommended if you want a company to sponsor you.

Population Density: ■ □ □ □ □ Civilization: ■ ■ □ □ □

‘The lowest population density!’

The Star Gate couldn’t be used again until he reached a certain level. The cities were hundreds of kilometres away from each other. Therefore several factors needed to be considered when choosing a city. The first thing Ark considered was the population density. Unlike R-14, Istana was a wide planet so hunting wouldn’t be a problem. But if a lot of users selected the city then the good quests and hunting ground might already be taken. There was a low chance of finding a dungeon first. When considering the population density, Nephalim was the city with the lowest. So Ark had thought it would be a quiet village but it was different from his expectations. It was a large city and the flashing electric bulletin boards reminded him of the nightlife in Gangnam’s gay area.

‘What on earth would Tatuine be like if Nephalim has the lowest population density?’

He turned pale just imagining it.

‘Anyway, it is good that I chose a city based on population density. There are more people than I expected so there might be some small problems.....’

Ark stepped forward while thinking.

–This is your first time in Nephalim.

A holograph of a beautiful woman appeared next to him.

–I am a guide that will tell the beginner pioneers pertinent city

related information about Nephalim. You can use me to discover the city's geography, the location of the stores and special facilities.

The future had facilities that couldn't even be compared to the medieval times.

-The subscription fee is 50 copper.

But it wasn't free. It was a paid service.

-This is your first time. For the cheap price of 50 copper, I can tell you about hunting grounds suitable for your level.

-Aha, a beginner. Are you looking for a suitable job? Only 50 copper.

Every step he took, another holographic image would appear and demand money.

'Well, some of the information is useful and 50 copper isn't that much.....'

He gained 40 copper just from cleaning the pipes. His financial status was different from the other level 10 users. But he didn't want to put his hard earned money into a vending machine like this. He could discover such basic information without spending money. Ark ignored the holograms and headed towards the plaza.

'This is the same in all games.'

The plaza located in the centre of the city was always bustling with noise.

"Recruiting people to go to the Northern Valley! 5 spots available."

“Recruiting two hunters specialized in small guns to go to the forest!”

“Buying a bulk purchase of recovery pills for 2 gold!”

“Selling various level 10~20 items at a cheap price. Please look at it.”

“Selling special IC card for body coatings. Whisper to inquire about the price.”

Users were buying and selling various items or recruiting for parties. The marketplace was an area where players naturally gravitated in games. Ark looked around the central plaza with shining eyes.

‘Won’t this give me a windfall?’

Ark looked towards a corner at the entrance of the plaza. The plaza in online games was similar to a flea market. It had a floating population and users were always trying to find a spot to do business. But when Ark arrived at the plaza, there was a pretty spacious, empty spot near the entrance! Someone must’ve just closed their business.

‘Isn’t this terrific luck?’

Ark quickly ran to the empty spot.

“Now shall I get started?”

He pulled out various items from his bag and organized them. Dagger, sword, crossbow, and various firearms.....

The number of weapons that emerged from his bag was 17. The reason Ark had so many weapons after leaving R-14 was simple. He

spent money to buy them. Ark had saved a considerable amount of money from R-14. There was a week between the time the paid hunting ground opened and he left R-14. In the meantime, he made an average of 7~8 gold per day. That was an income of 52 gold. The <Space Bug Processing> gave between 10~20 silver and he completed it 56 times. He received 20 silver from the leather and meat part 144 times. Including the mileage bonus, he had received 34 gold and 40 silver. When everything was put in order, he ended up with 86 gold and 40 silver. If ordinary users made this much money in the early stages then they would've been generous with food and drinks. However, Ark was different.

‘Money is used to make more money!’

Ark received a large sum of money and immediately made plans to increase that money. And he looked at the information list in R-14's weapon store.

-Due to the galactic federation encouraging pioneering, all pioneers will receive a 40% discount on R-14.

‘40% discount!’

In other words, if he bought it from R-14 then he could gain a 40% profit. Most users only had a dagger when they left for the frontier. Ordinary users had 2 gold by the time they reached level 10. Even with the 40% discount, items with a wearer restriction of level 10 was at least 5 gold. Therefore a level 10 weapon for users became a pie in the sky.....

But Ark was rich!

‘A 40% discount means the weapon will be 40% more expensive

after I go through the Star Gate.’ Of course, he would sell it cheaper than the store but he would still get at least a 20% profit. He could get 1 gold per weapon. 17 items was 17 gold. ‘It is a business where profit is guaranteed! There is no reason to hesitate!’

So Ark spent all his 86 gold on level 10 weapons. It might be expensive in R-14 but users who spent some time on the frontier would have at least 6 gold. Then users would be interested in investing in a new weapon! A weapon 20% cheaper than the stores was certainly enticing. In addition, he found a spot at the entrance where most people flowed in and out!

“Eh? These weapons, isn’t it much cheaper than the store?”

“Yeah. Moreover, there are guns and swords as well?

“I really wanted to change my weapon but I didn’t have enough money so it was painful.”

The users flocked like clouds as soon as the street stall opened. The weapons quickly turned back into gold and entered Ark’s pocket. It wasn’t just money that accumulated.

“Nowadays there are a lot of people in the northern area so it is difficult to hunt.”

“I heard that a new dungeon was found in the wilderness a while ago.”

“It is still impossible. The monsters there have an average level of 40.”

He could collect information from the people gathered. Even if he

was just sitting down, information about Nephalim would naturally enter his ears. There was no reason to waste 50 copper for the fee-based information services. This degree was common sense for Ark. Of course, most of the information didn't have much significance for Ark yet. But sometimes useful information would be heard.

“Doesn't this have slightly better performance than the weapons sold at the store?”

The beginner items from R-14 had slightly better performance than those sold at the frontier! Ark inwardly exclaimed after hearing that information.

‘Such a thing! If it is like that then I can increase the price to 30% and it will still sell!’

Ark realized his mistake and immediately corrected it.

“How much is this?”

“Ah, that? 6 gold and 50 silver.”

Ark cheekily raised the price by 10% right in front of people.

“Huh? Wasn't it 6 gold just now?”

Of course he received some customer complaints. But Ark was shameless.

“6 gold? You must've not heard properly. This is a business but I also have personal expenses.”

Even if it was only 10% more, that was still a profit. When he raised the price, some of the customers were offended and left but Ark was at the entrance of a populous plaza so it didn't matter.

Therefore he told 10 items during the 1 hour after he raised the price.

“Hey, get out of the way!”

A bunch of guys roughly approached and pushed people out of the way. There were four people pushing people out of the way of a man swinging his arms. He was obviously the boss of the group. They were wearing shiny armour and what looked like pretty high level equipment.

‘What the? No matter how I look, they don’t look like users with needing level 10 weapons.’

The group stared at Ark sitting on the ground. Then the boss’ forehead wrinkled and he began to talk.

“What are you doing here?”

“Huh?”

“I said what are you doing here?”

The fellow ended up mixing curses and crude language when talking. In addition, the character appearance was a deep blue man.....

Although Ark naturally became angry, right now he was a merchant. Ark displayed the patience of a merchant and answered.

“Can’t you see I’m running a business?”

“Who gave you permission?”

“Who gave me permission? That.....”

“This is out spot. Get lost.”

“Eh?”

Ark asked with a befuddled look. Then a henchman snapped in a rough voice.

“Didn’t you hear what hyung-nim said? Are you ears blocked? Get lost because this is out spot!”

“Haven’t you grasped the atmosphere yet? This is the spot where we’ve been trading for a few days. You stole it while we briefly stepped away. So disappear.”

“That....where does it say this is your spot? This is a place for a street stall. If you leave this place then it doesn’t belong to you anymore.”

“This guy isn’t afraid.”

The boss grinned and licked his lips.

“Would you like to quit the game today?”

Ark’s face was amazed at the threat. If they left a hunting ground or market spot empty then they couldn’t complain. That was the rule of online games. It was the same with Galaxian. That happened in R-14’s hunting grounds and it was the same for the street stalls here. They couldn’t claim a previous spot that they traded in.

‘But.....’

Sometimes there were people with no common sense. Although he had only been playing Galaxian for a short time, Ark had an online gaming career of 4 years. Ark had often encountered people like this in the previous game. They had higher levels than others

or their guild had a lot of power so those people believed they could ignore the rules!

‘I thought it was strange that a good spot at the entrance was empty.....’

A vast majority of the users in the plaza knew about those guys and avoided the spot. They didn’t want to quarrel with the thugs.

‘Encountering fellows like this at the beginning of a new game.’

If this was the previous game then those guys would already be tattered. The future of those thugs would’ve disappeared. However, things were different now. It was obvious that the boss was higher levelled than Ark. He also had 4 henchmen! There was no way he could win if he fought against the group. Those guys were the type of hold grudges so they would chase after him like leeches.

‘It can’t be helped. Anyway, I only have 3 items left from R-14. These guys are running wild.....it might hurt my pride but the only way is to retreat. Damn! Those bastards. I’ll remember your faces and will make you regret this later.’

“Okay. I’ll leave.”

Ark endured his anger and started to pack up his stall. No, he tried to pack up his stall.

“Wait, who said you could just go? Didn’t I say it? This is our spot. You selfishly engaged in business here so now you have to pay a fee. Isn’t that right?”

“What? A fee?”

“Yes, a fee. I’ll overlook it for 10 gold.”

‘This bastard, he wants a cut of my profit?’

Ark started at the man with an absurd expression.

“Hey, there’s no need to be upset. If you don’t have any cash then you can pay with items. Let’s see.....these are level 10 weapons? Well, taking a couple of these prices should be enough. If you give us those two items then we’ll send you off politely. That.....”

Then man suddenly frowned while surveying the street stall. He looked at an item in the corner and asked.

“Where did you get that item?”

Ark’s eyes reflexively shifted towards that corner. The item the man pointed towards was a toy in the shape of an airplane. When Ark was on the verge of leaving R-14, the octopuses had given him a token and the baby octopuses also wanted to give him something. The items that the baby octopuses gave him were 100% japtem. But he didn’t want to throw them away so he had displayed them.

‘Why the sudden interest in a toy?’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“No, that doesn’t matter. Come to think of it, 2 items for engaging in business here is a bit severe. Okay, I’ll be nice. If you give me that toy then I will let you leave.”

“Aigoo, Hyung-nim. Isn’t that too generous?”

“It can’t be helped. I can’t take money from a child. He is just a novice user.”

“Hey you! You got lucky today. Hyung-nim is being nice so give it

quickly and disappear.”

‘That bastard really.....’

Wasn’t this like an adult bullying a child? And this was a toy. He displayed it but he honestly didn’t think it would sell. He thought there was a possibility of chance of giving the japtem along with a weapon purchased. But the value of the toy wasn’t the problem for Ark. The stubbornness of these guys meant he was reaching the limit of his patience. He wanted to tear them apart. If those fellows wanted this item then he wouldn’t easily give it to them. Because those guys kept on threatening him. Ark replied in a low voice.

“Okay. You can have this if you want.”

“Good thinking.”

“For 90 gold.”

“What?”

“Just like you said. The rent is 10 gold? This toy was 100 gold. So I will give you this toy for 90 gold.”

“100 gold? For a toy like that?”

“Are you crazy?”

The henchmen shouted with displeased expressions. Then the boss lifted his arm and said.

“You....are you trying to trick me?”

“Of course not.”

“Do you think we look easy?”

“No you don’t.”

The boss fell silent at Ark's answer. He thought for a moment before saying with a smile.

“You have more guts than I thought. Okay. In fact, we were a bit harsh before so I'll take responsibility. I apologize for offending you. I want to buy that toy for a fair value. And all the problems between us will be cleared up. So how much is it?”

“Didn't I say? 100 gold. I can't discount even 1 copper.”

The man glared at Ark and said.

“Then I have no choice but to take it.”

“Try it.”

Ark stepped in front of the toy. Meanwhile the henchmen took out their swords and guns and approached. Ark and the octopuses' toys were surrounded by the thugs.

-Stop!

A mechanical sound rang out. Two androids were quickly approaching. The androids painted in red were in charge of policing Nephalim. The guard androids stood between Ark and the gang and said.

–Please stop. You are in a public place and any acts of violence are prohibited. If you don't stop then you will be arrested under the federation's 27th law. I'll warn you once again. Immediately disarm and disband.

“Sheesh!”

The boss clicked his tongue with annoyance. He shot a glance towards Ark and muttered.

“Your life was saved.”

“Let’s see? I don’t know whether it was my life that was saved.”

“You won’t be able to get away with that sassy attitude in the future. You’re a user so you can’t just live in the city. If you hunt outside the city then you will regret your actions today.

“I’m so afraid. Am I going to cry?”

Ark retorted and the boss’ face became even colder. He stared at Ark and growled.

“My name is Mald. You better remember that.”

“I’ll remember it. My name is.....”

Ark looked serious and took one step towards Mald. And smiled before cheekily saying.

“.....It’s a secret. It would be better for you to forget it.”

“You bitch! Really!”

Mald angrily grabbed Ark’s collar. No, he was about to grab it.

“Ugh!”

Ark suddenly screamed and rolled on the ground. Mald stared in confusion as Ark started screaming towards the guards.

“S-save me! T-that guy! He hit me!”

“W-what nonsense is this? I didn’t.....

Mald tried to approach Ark. Then the two androids blocked his way.

–Please stop. You have ignore our warnings and caused an act of

violence. You have been caught breaking the federation's law. Please come with us.

If you resist arrest then you will be charged with obstruction of justice.

“What are you talking about? When did I commit an act of violence? That bastard.....”

Mald tried to explain to the androids but they didn't budge. Ark had cleverly provoked Mald and blocked the android's view so they just saw Mald reaching towards Ark. Thus Mald was arrested for an act of violence.

–Are you resisting arrest?

“I didn't touch that bastard.....”

–Under the federation's 27th law, you are under arrest.

Pajijijik!

The androids stunned Mald without any notice. Mald convulsed and dropped to the ground and the androids pulled him across the plaza. The henchmen couldn't do anything.

“H-Hyung-nim!”

“T-this....why the hell.....”

“This is all because of that bastard! Hey, where is he?”

“That bitch! We won't let you go! We'll turn him into rice cakes!”

The henchmen turned and looked for Ark. However.....

“Heok! N-no! T-that bastard.....he disappeared!”

“Bah, those thugs!”

Ark spat on the ground and murmured.

“Do they think I’m stupid? Did he think I would tell him my personal details?”

Mald was dragged off by the guard androids while the henchmen were searching the plaza that Ark was already far away from. There was no way he would stay there for the henchmen to find him. Giggles started emerging once he was far away from the plaza.

“Heh, that stupid Mald. He was dragged off.”

The sight released all of the stress that was piled up. However, he couldn’t be careless. In fact, Ark hadn’t wanted to concede when Mald’s gang first confronted him. Nephalim was a city so not even those mindless thugs would dare PK. There was just one problem. Those guys were vindictive so they would search for him outside the side to PK.

‘While my style isn’t to avoid a fight.....’

He could only afford to do such a thing when he had a lot of skills.

‘Right now I’ve only just finished the beginner tutorial. There is no way I can leave the area of Nephalim. In such a situation, having a high level gang searching for me will be annoying. If those guys decided to disrupt my actions then I won’t even be able to leave the city.’

So he endured it. But eventually he exploded.

‘Those gangsters, their personality rubbed me the wrong way.....’

The situation Ark was most worried about had occurred. The combination of ‘being uncomfortable + insecurity + annoyance’ had flowed out. But he didn’t really regret it. He was forced to concede his spot thanks to their threats. Yet they said he stole their spot? They even threatened to make him quit the game!

‘Yes, the damage has already been done so there is no point worrying about it. There is no guarantee that these guys will retaliate and they can’t play the game 24 hours a day. For the moment I just have to be careful when going outside. They will eventually forget about me.....’

But Ark wouldn’t forget about his grudge.

‘They’re high levelled so they will eventually leave Nephalim. I’ll continue playing. They’ll see who I am in the future. Mald and his 4 henchmen.....I’ll be sure to remember their faces. Even if it takes 1 year or 2 years, I’ll make sure they regret it.’

Until then he had to avoid being noticed by those guys. Ark happily dreamed of his revenge.

“By the way.....”

After a while, Ark looked at the item in his hand. It was the toy airplane that Mald wanted. At first, he thought Mald was just crazy but he started thinking after leaving the plaza.

‘He was requesting 10 gold. It is weird that he suddenly switched to the toy. Desiring weapons is normal. So why did he want a toy that can’t be sold?’

It was a question that made Ark uncomfortable. He was able to find an answer after sneaking out of the plaza.

“It is impossible for a guy like that to want a worthless item. Then the answer is simple. He thinks the toy is worth more than 10 gold. There’s no doubt about it. He isn’t a novice. He also asked me where I got this toy. Then there must be something I don’t know hidden in this toy. Something worth at least 10 gold!”

Ark had the idea and sat near a fountain before examining the toy carefully. It was just a toy when glancing at it. Therefore he hadn’t looked over it after the baby octopuses gave it to him. Now that he had the idea ‘there must be something,’ he examined every inch of it. It was more sophisticated than it first appeared. It was unthinkable that something this sophisticated could be made by the baby octopuses.

‘Come to think of it.....’

Once he started questioning it, there was no limit to all his doubts. Ark didn’t know where the octopuses had got the toy from. From then on, Ark became perfectly immersed in the toy. He shook it back and forth and folded up the tail wing. Ark’s heart rate then soared as he discovered a vertical line.

‘It moves! There is definitely something there!’

Ark was convinced. The shape was that of a type of switch. Once the tail wing was folded up, the other attachments started moving.

‘The moving parts were the tail and the wings as well as the 5 antennas. But there is no change after they’ve all been operated. The parts must be manipulated in a certain order in order to

discover what is hidden in the toy.'

Inspiration starting shining.....

He examined the parts without any rest for 1 hour. Click. The bottom part of the toy suddenly opened and a USB like memory chip fell out. Then an information window appeared from the Nymphe.

-Undisclosed Memory Chip.

There are different memory chips with various types of information in Galaxian. These memory chips will connect to the Nymphe and hidden information can be confirmed.

“As expected, there is something!”

Ark cheered and connected the memory chip to the Nymphe with a sense of expectation.

-The memory chip is protected and you can't access the data. A security code must be entered into the Nymphe before the lock will be released.

That was the sound of all his expectations deflating.

“I have to enter a security code? What is it saying all of a sudden?”

It was normal for the key to be hidden near the problem in a key.

‘But I checked the toy precisely for 1 hour and couldn't find any hints. Then the only thing I can think of is that the NPC who gave

me this toy has the clue.'

Ark was filled with regret at the thought.

'There's no doubt about it. The baby octopuses who gave me the toy must have a hint about the security code! But I can't return to R-14. In the end, is there no way to get that hint? Dammit, why didn't I carefully examine the toy when I received it?'

Ark sighed and shook his head. Ark had spent a fortnight in R-14 raising his level and earning money. It was a training process to recover his original mindset. He cleaned the pipes 300 times and hunted the space bugs 200 times for a total of 500 completed quests! He thought he had recovered his original mindset after reaching an end to those repeatable quests.

'But I'm still not there yet. I should've checked the unusual item before other users paid attention to it. I still haven't regained all of my spirit.'

However, there was no reason to give up on obtaining the data. It was hard to get the security code but there must be more than one way to obtain the data. Mald wanted the toy so he must have a way to obtain the data without knowing the security code.

'Of course he won't kindly tell me.'

He had no choice but to find the method himself. Ark didn't think about it for long. He would be able to find something eventually. This was Galaxian, a world created for users.

"I will learn it eventually."

Ark stretched and stood up. His purse became thick thanks to the

weapons collected from R-14 and he also got some data. He felt bad about entangling with Mald's gang but it still learnt something important. He was interested but he wouldn't worry about it too much. Ark still had a lot of work to do.

“The first place I will stop by is.....”

Space 7: Welcome to Nephalim (PART: 2)

SPACE 7. Welcome to Nephalim (PART: 2)

“Hoh, Bhurad?”

Ponen looked at him with an interested expression. Ark was in a high rise building that was the galactic federation’s branch in Nephalim. Ark had visited this place to hand in the recommendation letter received from Bhurad, the manager of R-14’s training centre. The branch of the galactic federation wasn’t a place that general users could enter. But Ark received permission after showing the recommendation letter. He went through various processes and was able to meet the NPC Ponen who was in charge of supporting the pioneers.

“Bhurad isn’t easily please so it is rare for a friend like that to write a recommendation letter for a pioneer. Yes, I think I’ve heard about you. There was a pioneer who passed R-14’s training process with a fairly high score. So the other pioneers also became quite lively.”

Ark was unaware of the commotion on R-14. Once he finished the training in R-14, it was impossible to return to the starting area. So Ark hadn’t bothered looking up information about it. Ark just thought that Ponen’s words were just flattery.

“I just tried my best.”

“Your attitude is very good.”

Ponen nodded with a satisfied expression and continued to the

main point.

“Like I said, there are a lot of pioneers entering the universe. But I haven’t found many pioneers worth writing about. Most of them seem quite weak. However, you’ve received Bhurad’s recognition so you must be different. You are qualified to receive sponsorship from the galactic federation. Of course, you still need to pass a review process even if you have Bhurad’s recommendation letter.”

An information window appeared from the Nymphe as soon as Ponon finished talking.

-You have completed <R-14’s Training Centre Manager Bhurad’s Recommendation Letter> quest.

-It is possible to be sponsored by the galactic federation’s branch in Nephalim.

You need to go through an examination process to qualify. If you pass the examination process then it is possible to be sponsored by the galactic federation.

‘It is a sponsor related quest like I expected.’

He had guessed it after receiving the recommendation letter. All users in Galaxian needed a sponsor.

Galaxian was a game where humans couldn’t move around in space, which was the game’s environment. While the centre of Istana had been terraformed (transforming the planet’s environment to be suitable for humans), only 10% of Istana had been completed. The other 90% were environments where humans couldn’t live. In order to explore the other areas and space, the

human's DNA needed to be able to adapt to the most extreme environments through body coating. That's why there was no system to pick a basic aptitude like warrior when Galaxian was first started. Galaxian was unlike other games and the basic aptitudes could only be chosen once the body coating was received. That was followed by a secondary career choice. So the game couldn't really start until the body coating was received. It was also difficult to receive quests without the coating. That's why R-14 only had repeatable quests. So the pioneers' top priority was to receive the body coating. The conditions to receive the body coating was to be level 30 and to have a sponsor.

+Sponsor+

Users in Galaxian can ask various organizations to be a sponsor. A user with a sponsor can live a life on the frontiers. A sponsor and user have a mutual collaborative relationship. The user will gather a lot of information and ingredients for the sponsor and the sponsor will give various products that they developed at a discount. It is a system where the user returns the benefits to the sponsor.

Meanwhile, the goal of the sponsor's organization might change depending on the objectives of the user. Therefore it is important for the contract to benefit both the user and sponsor. Users will have a chance to buy products from the sponsor before it goes on sale and test it out for the sponsor.

A sponsor can be divided into 3 different groups. The first is the galactic federation. The second is the 4 big companies and the last group are the small and medium sized companies. Each place has different desires for the user they want to sponsor so the screening process is different. The game progress depends on the sponsor so please choose carefully so that you will have no regrets.

This was the information that Ark knew about the sponsors.

“You might not know it yet but having the galactic federation as a sponsor is a big deal. The basic policy of the federation is to encourage space pioneering so the support given to pioneers is incomparable to everywhere else.”

Ark also knew this as well. The galactic federation was literally the centre of power. If the federation was his sponsor then it was possible to enjoy special privileges and he could grow quickly. That's why most users were eager to contract the galactic federation as a sponsor! That was why the area around the federal building was infested with users. But the competitive rate also increased so it was difficult to meet the screening criteria. Even being qualified to receive the formal test for sponsorship wasn't an easy task. Ponen reiterated that point once again.

“This opportunity isn't given to everyone. I can't even count the amount of pioneers that gather to get the support of the federation. But only some of them get to go through the screening process. They are the top 1% elite. Among those, you are special.

You've received the privilege of receiving the examination without going through a qualification procedure first."

Privilege.....it was a superficial word. The federation certainly wouldn't sponsor a simple thug like Mald. However, the reason Ark visited the galactic federation wasn't to form a sponsor contract. The sponsorship program of Galaxian had a great influence on the user's game progress. Of course he needed to pick the best place but he wouldn't chose based on the standards of other users. He would meticulously question the sponsors and select the best one for him. Good clothes was no use if they didn't fit properly. This was the difference between Ark and the other users! Of course he couldn't say that he would 'compare the quality and come back again.'

"I'm just a novice who only arrived in Nephalim from R-14 for a few hours. I am thankful for your words and the opportunity but I need some time to think. I'm still not convinced that I am eligible for such preferential treatment. Despite the recommendation from Bhurad-nim, I would like a bit more experience before participating in the examination process."

"I can understand why Bhurad likes you."

Ponen smiled and nodded.

"There are a lot of brave pioneers but a careful pioneer is unusual. Yes, you can come back after thinking about it. If it is you then you can walk through the door at any time."

Ddiring, ddiring!

It was the sound of his favourable impression increasing. His

specialty was raising his intimacy with the NPC despite rejecting their offer! If he used his silver tongue then the NPC's reaction would change. Ark gained confidence and cut to the main subject.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Ask anything you want.”

“Do you know how to release data locked with a security code?”

“How to unlock data.....are you talking about hacking?”

‘Hacking? Ah, I see. Unlocking data would definitely be hacking.

“Yes. That's right. Can such techniques be learnt?”

This was the reason why Ark came here. He had found the memory chip in the toy but it was locked with a security code. This meant a technology existed to unlock it. But he wouldn't be able to discover such information just wandering through the city.

‘Asking someone will be the quickest way to find the information.’

The galactic federation situation in the centre of the city would definitely know such information.

Of course, it was impossible to just walk in and ask the NPC. But Ark possessed Bhurad's recommendation letter. Furthermore, it was possible to raise his public image thanks to his silver tongue. He thought it would be easy to elicit technical information but.....

Ponen's expression suddenly became chilly.

“Who do you think I am?”

“Huh? Who? That.....”

“I am a government official. Yet you’re asking me about illegal technology?”

“I-Illegal?”

“Of course! Hacking is basically looking at someone else’s information without permission. It is a crime. Asking a government official like me about a criminal technique is outrageous. You just arrived at Nephalim so I’ll let it go once. But if you talk about a criminal technique like that again then the recommendation letter won’t matter. This conversation is over.”

Ark felt like he had been struck in the cheek. That feeling continued after he parted from Ponen and left the building. Ponen’s attitude had changed 180 degrees thanks to the mention of the illegal technique ‘hacking.’

‘Well, it is understandable when hearing his words.....’

Hacking was an unauthorized intrusion into other people’s computers. ‘Unauthorized’ technology was classified as illegal by default.

‘Based on Ponen’s reaction, it is clear that hacking exists in Galaxian. I wasn’t sure there were such techniques until I saw that reaction. It might be illegal but the technique still exists. However, it is illegal so it will be difficult for to find a NPC to teach it.’

Most users would probably give up by this point. However, Ark wasn’t an ordinary user.

‘This is surprisingly useable information!’

Ark wasn’t the type to comply with rules. No, in a game he would

rather do illegal things. The reason why? That was of course.....

Money! It was a sad reality but illegal actions gave more money! Of course, illegal actions might be a blow to ethics conscious people but sometimes going against the law had more positive effects for people. Wasn't it similar to Robin Hood fighting against injustice? Sometimes the hero had to do illegal things....Ark mentally armed himself with that thought despite the reaction from the NPC.

‘That guy Mald gave up 10 gold for the memory chip. It is worth doing something illegal in order to get that data.’

He wasn't distressed about learning hacking. The problem was finding an NPC to teach him the hacking skill. Ponen was sensitive to the illegal actions because he was a government official. General NPCs might have a different reaction. But common sense dictated that he couldn't ask just anyone about an illegal technique.

‘If it is that location.....’

Ark thought for a while before opening his map. He entered some instructions and a red dot was displayed on a corner of Nephalim. He navigated towards the area indicated on the map and the atmosphere instantly changed. The place where he emerged from the Nymphe was a plaza surrounded by tall buildings and the atmosphere felt like it was the centre of Seoul. Meanwhile, the area where the Nymphe directed him was the factory area. It was filled with small and large factories blowing smoke. Except for the large 4 companies and the galactic federation, this was the place with will small companies. The major sponsors might have large buildings in the centre of the city but the small and medium sized

companies couldn't be ignored. The small companies didn't give a stable economic base like the major sponsors. However, the small businesses often had entirely different and unique technology. Depending on the propensity of the user, the small companies could sometimes be more favourable than the large sponsors. They all had their own pros and cons. Although there were only approximately 100 small sponsors in the area, the overall atmosphere was bustling. If the major sponsor was a department store then this was like a traditional market?

-A new product has been released!

-This gives special effects to various equipment. Take a look.

-Inviting pioneers. I'm registered to support pioneers and am looking to recruit new pioneers.

Various monitors displayed different advertisements.

"Have you seen those items?"

"It was so frightening it made me laugh. Glasses that make your eyes pop out!"

"This increases attack power. It will be a jackpot if used when hunting in a party."

"Are there any stores that sell cheap armour?"

"Damn, the federation and the 4 big businesses refused me so I have to look for a sponsor here?"

The users were looking at products or checking sponsor information. It also wasn't strange to see androids and aliens walking around town. It was hard to see everything. Ark wanted to

snoop everywhere but he had to postpone that pleasure for the moment. He had come to the business district for a reason.

‘Well, there is plenty of time to visit.’

Ark made his way through the thick crowds. He rounded several corners and the streets became quieter.

“The map says it should be somewhere around here.....”

Ark checked the map and looked around until he saw the sign he desired.

<Gear> Tori's Ironworks. From ships to small screws! All orders custom made!

“Here! This is the company that Cheksun introduced me to!”

This was why Ark had visited the commercial district. Ark hadn't just received a recommendation letter from Bhurad. He had completed the pipe cleaning quest 300 times. That was 60 kilometres so he received a recommendation letter from Cheksun.

‘This letter of recommendation will also be related to a sponsor like the one received from Bhurad.’

It was the reason he didn't have to go through the qualification process with the galactic federation.

Aside from the federation and 4 big companies, there were countless numbers of small and medium sized businesses. Of course, it was impossible to examine all the companies. But shouldn't he find out about a place that he received a recommendation for?

“This is the ironworks company called Gear?”

Ark's face distorted strangely as he read the sign. Ark only knew that Cheksun's friend Tori owned an ironworks company called 'Gear' when he came here. Apart from the friend's name, the company was called Gear! Furthermore, he had entered the federal building based on Bhurad's recommendation so he had expected something from Cheksun's recommendation. However, a simple ironworks building was in front of Ark. It was a small, shabby factory far away from the main commercial district. Well, Bhurad was the manager of the training district while Cheksun was in charge of cleaning the pipes. It was why Ark had visited the federal branch first but.....

“Even so, this is too terrible.”

The shocking visuals of Gear made him extremely disappointed.

‘That Cheksun bastard, he seemed to have misunderstood.’

Most users couldn't even last 1~2 hours cleaning the pipes while he lasted a week. Of course, Ark had his own circumstances. However, Cheksun didn't understand his inner circumstances and seemed to have misunderstood Ark. He thought it was Ark's calling instead of a chore. Therefore he had introduced Ark to an ironworks company.

‘Well, this is a recommendation I received from cleaning.’

He almost didn't want to hand over the letter of recommendation after seeing the ironworks. However, Ark's purpose in coming to the commercial district wasn't just Cheksun's recommendation letter. It was in order to learn information about the hacking skill. If he considered that hacking was illegal then it would be difficult

to find information from the city centre where the big businesses were. It was impossible to find an illegal Samsung dealer in a department store. But the commercial district contained small businesses.

‘Nephalim’s commercial district is like an online shopping mall.....’

The answer would appear! Ark believed that he could somehow learn the hacking technique. They wouldn’t outright advertise an illegal technique but Ark would somehow be able to find it. And he was more likely to find illegal things in gloomier places.

‘I might be able to find it surprisingly quickly.’

Ark thought as he entered the ironworks. He had just about to enter when he bumped into someone at the entrance “Hihihihi! Welcome!”

‘Eh? What, what the? This?’

Ark reflexively looked around. A voice came out so he naturally thought it was a person. However, it was an animal around 1 metre in size. It was a beast covered in black fur. At first Ark thought it was a guard dog protecting the store. The beast moved its hand and clamoured away.

“What are you looking for Customer-nim? Just say the word. As stated on the sign, our ironworks company does anything from ships to screws. Customer-nim can order whatever you like. Ah, of course Customer-nim will have to pay for it. Hihihihi!”

‘Hamster? It is a hamster?’

The beast sporting a beard laughed and rocked back and forth. At first it looked like a dog but now he could see it was actually a hamster. A talking hamster was a little shocking but Ark had done business with octopuses. Furthermore, he had seen aliens as he was crossing the commercial district so there was no reason for surprise.

‘This alien.....’

“Are you Tori?”

“Yes, I am Tori the owner of Gear.”

The hamster stuck out his belly with a proud look. No way..... hamster Tori.....the ironworks company....it really was him? Ark looked at Tori with a dumbfounded expression. Tori then proudly pointed towards the front of the building where they were several machinery were busily working.

“Now, now, please go around and look. You can see everything. There are a lot of goods you might need so just say the word.”

“I didn’t come here to buy something.”

“Eh? You didn’t come to buy something?”

Tori pulled his beard and clamoured.

“What? You’re just a spectator? Dammit, why are you peeking into someone’s factory if you don’t want to buy anything? Do you think this is a zoo? Don’t just assume that I’m a hamster! If you want to peek without buying anything then just go away. How annoying.”

“No, that’s not.....”

“What? I said that you’re annoying. Buy something or go away.”

The hamster’s attitude completely changed after discovering that Ark wasn’t a customer. Anyway, he had no intention of giving the recommendation letter to the hamster. However, he might be able to learn to hack from this guy. Ark moved closer and spoke in a low voice.

“I came here to obtain something.”

“Obtain something? Is that a joke? Didn’t you just say that you didn’t want to buy anything?”

“No, not an item but a technology.”

“Eh? Technology?”

“Yes, hacking techniques. Do you know someone who can teach a skill like that?”

“What, what the? Hacking?”

Tori looked at Ark with surprised eyes. His eyes became the size of baseballs before he suddenly grabbed Ark’s collar.

“How dare you ask me something like that? Don’t you know it is an illegal technology? Huh? What are you trying to do? Do you intend to close other people’s businesses? No, maybe that is your purpose? Where? What bastard sent you? No, it doesn’t matter if someone sent you. You stay here. I’m going to arrest you for interfering with my business!”

Tori started frantically manipulating his Nymphe. Ark was at a total loss as he starting calling the guards. He had been blinded by the fact that Tori was a hamster and never imagined he would

cause an uproar like this.

‘Is hacking more of a crime then I thought?’

The situation was really difficult.

“P-please wait a minute!”

“Why should I wait? You’re screwed now!”

“No, that.....do you know someone called Cheksun?”

“Cheksun?”

Tori flinched and turned his head.

“Cheksun? Cheksun who works at R-14?”

“Yes, I came with an introduction from Cheksun-nim.”

“Really? You’re not lying? I’m not a naive hamster.”

Ah, he said he was a hamster with his own mouth. Didn’t he say not to assume that just now? No, now wasn’t the time to think about something like that. Ark took out Cheksun’s recommendation letter and handed it to the suspicious Tori. Tori blinked while reading the recommendation letter and hit Ark’s chest.

“Hey, young friend. If you had this then you should’ve shown it. I wouldn’t have doubted you.”

“Doubt?”

“I mean....just come in for the time being.”

Tori looked around and entered the ironworks. The interior was even more hopeless than the outside. Trash and old tools were scattered around and it honestly looked more like a junkyard than

an ironworks.

‘Anyway, that has nothing to do with me. I have no intention of getting a job in a place like this.’

Tori sat down on a dusty chair and began to talk.

“I thought you belonged to the government.”

“Huh? Belong to the government?”

“Hihihihi, it makes sense. I make illegal equipment that the government forbids from being sold so sometimes they try to entrap me. White rice might be delicious but I don’t want to be locked behind bars for the rest of my life. I became upset because I thought your question about hacking was an entrapment.

“No, I.....”

“That’s okay. I can trust you if Cheksun sent you.”

Tori stroked his beard and muttered.

“Hihihihi, it’s been a while since I heard the name Cheksun. I’ve been living buried in oil and iron but Cheksun won’t sent just anyone to me.”

Tori suddenly became lost in his memories. Tori then smiled and looked at Ark.

“Yes, did you ask Cheksun?”

“Huh? What did you say?”

“What? Aren’t you looking for a hacking technician?”

“Yes, that’s right.....”

“What? Then you didn’t ask Cheksun about hacking?”

“No, I only found hacking necessary after I entered Nephalim and I had Cheksun’s recommendation so I decided to ask Tori-nim about it. But how is hacking related to Cheksun? Is Cheksun a hacking technician?”

“Cheksun? No. Me!”

Tori hit his chest and laughed.

“Hihihihi, I’m now the owner of the ironworks but I was once an excellent hacker.”

It was like an elite sounding voice. But that wasn’t important to Ark. The important thing was that the hamster was a hacker! Ark looked at him with an expectant look and asked.

“Can you teach me?”

“Of course.”

Tori nodded. He thought for a moment and made a big decision.

“Since you came with Cheksun’s recommendation, it will be 200 gold! Give me 200 gold! And I will thoroughly teach you the basics.”

“Huh? 200 gold?”

Of course Ark knew that he couldn’t learn the hacking technique for free. It was common sense that NPCs would require money to teach skills. Hacking was illegal so it was natural for it to be more expensive. However, he never imagined that it would need 200 gold. Of course, he knew that learning the skill would add tremendous value later on. A technique that cost 200 gold might give him 1,000 gold later on. But the problem was Ark’s wallet. He

had 80 gold from selling the weapons from R-14. Mald stopped him from selling the remaining items but it would only add up to 100 gold. He was lacking 100 gold.

‘Damn, does that mean I can’t confirm the data on the memory chip until I collect another 100 gold?’

The thought of not being able to check the data made him more anxious. Now he didn’t even have the money to learn the hacking technique? Ark sighed at the thought.

“Hihihi, you seem panicked. You panicked. I guess so. Yes, didn’t you come from R-14? It is impossible for you to have 200 gold.”

‘What? That bastard, he said this knowing that I have no money?’

Ark angrily stared at Tori. But Tori just said with a smile.

“That was a joke just now. Normally it would be 200 gold but I can’t do that to someone who came with Cheksun’s recommendation letter. I’ll teach you the hacking technique for the moment.”

“R-really?”

“Of course it’s not for free.”

“Huh? But I don’t have 200 gold.”

“I know. So I’ll make you an offer.”

“An offer?”

“Clean-up. You need the hacking technology and I need resources to operate the ironworks. So I’ll teach you hacking if you gather resources for me. It was take around 20 attempts to successfully

learn hacking so I'll teach you every time you gather resources worth 10 gold. I don't make this offer very often. I'm only offering you this support because you came with Cheksun's recommendation letter. You can learn hacking and I can gather resources so isn't it a good thing?"

'Certainly.....'

Ark understood after hearing Tori's explanation that hacking wasn't an easy skill to successfully learn. It took a couple of attempts to master. Even if 200 gold was collected later, he needed to invest time in learning the skill. However, Tori's system meant it was possible to save time. It also didn't require money to leave his pocket. The proposition wasn't bad from Ark's viewpoint. No, it was a very good suggestion.

'When thinking about it, I was able to get a lot of money from the paid hunting ground and the compensation for the repeatable quest led to Tori. So doesn't the early mistake of breaking the dagger seem like a good thing now?'

The encounter with Mald had already been completely deleted from Ark's head. Ark quickly nodded.

"Yes, I will accept."

"I've been feeling lonely so having a pupil doesn't feel bad. But learning hacking isn't easy. I'll give you the basic hacking tools now but not everyone can become a hacker. The hacking tools is just a tool. There will be no effect if the person doesn't know how to use it properly. So you will need to write your own hacking tools directly. Doing this is hard work and will require a lot of time so

are you prepared for it?”

“Yes!”

“Okay. Then let’s begin.”

Tori stood up and lifted his Nymphe.

“Bring me your Nymphe. I will immediately transfer you the hacking tools.”

Tori touched his Nymphe to Ark’s and manipulated something.

-Tori has wirelessly connected to your Nymphe.

Are you sure you want to allow the wireless connection? Y/N

“Yes! Yes! Yes!”

The data was uploaded onto his Nymphe and the information window appeared.

-The hacking tools have been downloaded onto your Nymphe.

-All data has been initialized by the hacking tools. If order to properly use the tools, you need to manually upgrade the user settings.

‘That’s it! I got the hacking tools!’

Hacking was a technique that was even hard to find information

on. The hacking tool was the foundation of the techniques. It really was a scary feeling seeing everything work out. That was the problem. Things had worked out so well it was almost scary.....

Because Ark had forgotten an important fact. Ark realized it when he examined the information window that next appeared.

-You have completed the <Manager of Sector 7 Cheksun's Recommendation Letter> quest.

-Congratulations!

Cheksun who is the manager of R-14's facilities has sent a recommendation letter to Tori in Nephalim for a sponsorship offer. You have accepted Tori as a sponsor and entered into a contract with a small company.

This contract is a binding.....

Ark had received the <Manager of Sector 7 Cheksun's Recommendation Letter> quest. And the recommendation quest was associated with a sponsor quest. After receiving Cheksun's recommendation, Tori suddenly became friendly and offered to teach him hacking techniques.

Ark was so caught up in learning the hacking skill that he forgot it was a quest. Tori talked about 'support' when making the proposition to Ark. This meant he had accepted a sponsor contract! The contract was concluded when the hacking tools were downloaded.

‘Oh my god! This is.....’

Ark was discouraged by the shocking development.

“Then let’s start work.”

Tori laughed and continued.

“Ah, what good timing. In fact, I had needed someone to collect the metal parts. These days there are many pioneers but not a lot of them would want to make a contract like this. I’ve been worrying about the penalty if I don’t meet the due date but fortunately you’ve arrived. Thank you, thank you. Hihihhi!”

“Huh? Contract? Penalty? What.....”

“Hey! Tori!”

Then he heard a voice from behind him. Ark felt breathless as his jaw dropped. A group of 10 people wearing primitive armour and holding strange looking rifles were heading towards them. The person who attracted Ark’s attention was the huge figure at the front of the group. His whole face was covered in hair so only the eyes and mouth was visible but he had a huge figure filled with muscles.

The human-alien woolly person approached Tori with great joy.

“Oh! Clem, you came!”

“Hah, I don’t enjoy seeing a hamster greet me.”

“Hey, hey, don’t be like that. We’re in the same line of business after all.”

“A business partner.....but why did you call?”

“I told you the other day that I wanted to find a worker to help

me. I've found him. Here!"

Tori laughed as he indicated towards Ark. The alien called Clem looked at Ark and said.

"Sheesh, what the? You want us to bring along a human who can't even properly carry baggage?"

"You were the one who said humans weren't that bad."

"Well, I guess so. But did you make the contract properly? It would be troublesome if issues occur later."

"Of course. He agreed to work hard until he collects metal parts worth 200 gold."

"200 gold.....that condition will take quite a while so it is fine."

Clem nodded and said towards one of his men.

"Hey, take this guy."

And heavily armed warriors grabbed Ark's left and right arms. Ark stared at Tori and Clem with a stunned expression and stuttered.

"Eh? Eh? W-wait a minute! What on earth is this? Where are you taking me?"

"Hey, Tori?"

When Clem frowned, Tori quickly approached Ark and said.

"What? What nonsense are you saying? Didn't you make a contract to gather metal worth 200 gold in exchange for learning the skill? Why are you acting like this now?"

"No, I understand but these people....."

Ark stuttered with confusion before closing his mouth. An information window had floated from Tori's Nymphe.

-Sponsor's Technology Transfer Contract (Tori-Ark)

The sponsor Tori will teach Ark a technique if he gathers metal parts worth 200 gold. Tori will only pay for the metal parts and Ark will work with a contractor to gather the parts. If the contract is violated then the sponsorship between Ark and Tori will be destroyed and Ark will pay a penalty.

"This is the agreement."

Tori said with a smile.

"Eh? But I'm gathering metal parts....."

"It is difficult for one person to gather metal parts. I even gave you a job with the suppliers who collect metal parts so why are you complaining?"

"Eh? Eh? Eh? W-wait a minute! Wait a minute!"

Ark screamed but the heavily armed warriors just dragged Ark away. Then Ark saw a shocking scene.

"Now I've given you a cheap worker like promised....."

"Okay. We will buy all the necessary supplies here while we're in Nephalim. This time it should take 3 days so give me 10 repair tools and ammo."

“Hihihihi, thank you! Thank you! I’ll load it up!”

Tori happily twisted his hands and jumped around. Ark realized it at that moment. There was a contract between Tori and Clem. Tori would introduce Clem to a worker in order to gain an exclusive supplies contract. That was why Tori accepted metal parts in exchange for the hacking skill! Now Ark.....

‘I.....was sold?’

Nephalim was a minor city on Istana! There were thugs who monopolized trading spots and a hamster who scammed him.

“T-this is a scam! This contract is invalid!”

Ark cried out futilely.

Space 8: Scavenger

SPACE 8. Scavenger

“Heh, something like that.”

Ark laughed and muttered. He felt like his brain was exploding when he first saw the sponsor agreement with Tori. What user would turn down the proposal of the galactic federation in order to make a contract with a junkyard? And his contractor was a wicked hamster who sold off his employees to other companies. It was outrageous. So he had yanked his hair and tried to get out of it. Ark had already put everything down. Anyway, there was no point regretting it since it had already happened. And Ark wasn't the type to get lost in frustration or despair. When he looked at the past, he had countless numbers of hopeless situations. People who watched Ark called it luck but that was funny. Ark didn't stand on a place higher than others because of luck. No, Ark was fortunate because of his hardships. Those tribulations were the driving force in making Ark strong.

‘It is the same this time.’

He had suffered when he was young. The game was the same. He had trouble in his early days as well.

‘Yes, I've made a mistake but this is still the beginning. Any mistakes would just be rudimentary mistakes. It was only novice level damage. The damage isn't worry really worrying about. I didn't meticulously check the contract so I ended up bleeding.’

Of course, this mistake wasn't that small. Sponsors had a great influence over the user's game progress in Galaxian. Each sponsor had their own pros and cons but.....

'This is a junkyard! A junkyard!'

He had never intended to form a contract with a hamster operating a junkyard. Forming a sudden contract with the junkyard was enough for him to roll around the ground pulling his hair. Thus he had searched for ways out of the contract.

-Currently Ark-nim's has signed a 'provisional contract' with Gear.

A user's first formal agreement with a sponsor will be a 'provisional contract.' There is a probationary period and the amount of support received in the period is fairly restrictive. The user can terminate the contract during this period if the sponsor doesn't agree with them.

In that case, the user has to return the 200 gold support they received to the sponsor.

A 'provisional contract' system! Ark was comfortable due to that. The publishers had placed that consideration for users like Ark who made a contract by mistake.....he thought that but he was stuck because of the penalty. He had to return the sponsor's support but that was 200 gold! Ark was level 15 so there was no way he had that amount of money. However, it was important that he still had room for choice. He could still look for other sponsors.

Having information was the best way to play the game.

‘I can’t waste 200 gold when I can learn a necessary skill and will gain experience.’

The experience was useful.

‘Fortunately, I’ve already gained close to 100 gold. If I prepare another 100 gold then I can escape from the junkyard. Well, 100 gold seems like a lot but didn’t I gain 100 gold just from cleaning and killing space bugs at R-14? Yes, there is no point in paying the penalty.’

And he could even make money. If he thought about it, there wasn’t a big problem.

‘I’m doing this to learn the hacking skill. If I look at the situation then I was abandoned and sold. No, not sold. I’m able to gain the metal parts thanks to the separate contract between Tori and Clem. I just have to work hard and collect 200 gold worth of metal parts.’

Ark decided after organizing everything. And he surprisingly had a lot of interest in this job.

‘The Silver Hand.....’

It was the official name of the service provider that Ark was assigned to.

“There seems to be a strange atmosphere around the contract but don’t worry because we aren’t bad people. We have to spend a lot of time together until you gather metal parts worth 200 gold for Tori so we should get along. A workplace with a family like

atmosphere. That's what I'm aiming for."

Clem showed his fangs as he laughed. A huge beast like alien with sharp fangs was talking. Normal people would tremble with fear from the atmosphere but.....

Ark bravely gathered his courage and asked.

"What do I have to do?"

"What? That hamster, didn't he tell you?"

Clem scratched his head with an irritated expression.

"Then do you know Nakuma?"

"Nakuma?"

"You also don't know about Nakuma. So that hamster tricked you. Anyway, it isn't bad even if you have no experience with fighting on the frontier."

Clem said and explained.

"It is good that you met us before roaming the frontier. The Nakuma are unclear space creatures. No, they aren't life forms.....anyway, they don't have an original shape. But these guys like metal above anything else. They will instinctively look for metal and form their bodies around it. So they are almost like living androids. Anyway, Istana is full of Nakuma."

A space life form that moved around and collected metal debris! If this was a fantasy setting then it would be similar to a type of zombie.

"Most of the Nakuma are handled by pioneers and the federation army. But there is an area they always avoid. Thus the Nakuma

would multiply and in some cases they will threaten the safety of the city. We are a mercenary unit specialized in hunting Nakuma in those types of areas. The federation gives us a fee for handling the Kuma and we can also get income from the metal parts dropped by the Nakuma. We arrived in Nephalim a few days ago. I knew Tori from before so I asked him to recruit new workers in the city. Then Tori told me to buy supplies from him in exchange for introducing me to a worker.”

That was the reason Tori sold Ark.

“But you don’t have to worry about maintenance.”

Fortunately he was going to be paid.

‘Moreover, it is better to hunt with the Silver Hand since I don’t know anything about the Nakuma.’ If he hunted then he could organize all his work in Nephalim. This was the first time he was actually hunting in Galaxian after arriving at the frontier. If he was with experienced NPC’s then he didn’t have to worry about dying. It was also possible to receive metal parts to learn hacking. ‘Raising my level and collecting metal parts, isn’t it killing two birds with one stone?’

This was why Ark accepted it obediently. While Ark was lost in thought, Clem laughed and hit his back with a huge palm.

“Kuahahahaha. What? Are you scared? A newborn chick has just arrived at the frontier. But for now you don’t have to worry. The Nakuma are easily taken care of with large weapons. And.....”

Ku ku ku ku, kong!

The bumpy truck stopped with a rattling noise and the door to

the container opened. Clem snorted and raised his body.

“We’ve arrived. Everybody get down! Ready the supplies to start hunting immediately!”

“Hey, why are you just sitting there? Quickly help me carry the baggage!”

Ark exited the truck and helped the other soldiers carry the baggage. Supplies and large tents were built outside the truck. This was the outpost of the Silver Hand mercenary troops. But that wasn’t what caught Ark’s eye.

‘Swamp! This is the southern region of Nephalim!’

Ark had arrived at the swamp located to the south of Nephalim! Now Ark could understand Clem’s words. There was an area where pioneers and the federal army didn’t want to hunt the Nakuma. That was the swamp area where various penalties to agility were applied. A novice user would want to avoid hunting on terrain like that as much as possible. That’s why there were too many users in the northern hunting grounds! The users wanted to avoid the southern swamp area where a penalty to agility was applied.

‘This is another reason why I chose Nephalim!’

Ark had chosen Nephalim among the many cities. It was mainly for the swamp area located south of Nephalim. Most users wanted to avoid this area but Ark was different. Ark had just.....

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

“Hey! The combatants are about to leave so clean and examine their equipment! We’ll be hunting the Nakuma immediately

afterwards. Heksu, take the new worker and teach him. What do you say Ark? You will learn from Heksu from now on. All Attackers assemble!”

Ark stared at Clem with a bewildered expression after hearing his cry.

“W-wait a minute. I’m staying here?”

“Huh? So?”

“I’m not participating in the hunt against the Nakuma?”

“Nakuma hunting?”

Clem looked doubtful at Ark’s question. Then all of this body hair quivered as he cracked up laughing.

“Kuahahaha. That’s why you were so nervous in the truck. Didn’t I tell you not to worry? I told you. We aren’t bad guys. We’re mercenaries specializing in hunting Nakuma so we wouldn’t bring a newborn chick to the hunting ground. I don’t need Attackers but a Scavenger.

“Attacker? Scavenger?”

“Yes, the Silver Had is divided into Attacker and Scavenger. Attackers fight. We hunt Nakuma. And the Scavengers will clean everything up. Didn’t I tell you? Our main source of revenue is the metal parts dropped by the Nakuma. However, it is difficult to reclaim the metal parts dropped in the swamp. Therefore we need to increase the number of Scavengers. So you just need to collect the loot. There are a lot of chores at the base but at least you don’t have to worry about dying.”

“T-that is a problem!”

Ark shouted angrily. Once again, the reason Ark thought he was fortunate was because the Silver Hand was a mercenary troop. He thought he could gain experience and metal parts. But now all he had to do was collect the loot? In the end he had to obtain metal worth 200 gold without eating any experience? Furthermore, the attackers in the Silver Hand could also collect loot while battling. He was wasting a lot of time to gain experience while learning the hacking skill.

“I am a warrior!”

“Warrior?”

Clem continued watching Ark. And he burst out laughing.

“This child didn’t even know what the Nakuma was and now you want to hunt them?”

“T-that.....I might not know about the Nakuma but I’m still a warrior. I know that I’m lacking. However, I’m still a warrior. This is a warrior’s pride. I can’t just search through the muddy ground. I won’t blame Captain-nim even if I die so make me an Attacker!”

Ark stared into his eyes and strongly insisted. Clem’s face also became quite serious.

“You won’t bear a grudge even if you die.....that’s not the problem.....”

Clem scratched his beard with a perplexed expression. He nodded after a moment.

“I am also a warrior. I can’t ignore your pleading as that would kill your warrior’s pride. Okay, if you have this much confidence then I’ll test you. Hey, didn’t we catch some Nakuma as research material for the federation? Bring me a small one.”

“Huh? Why would you.....”

“It’s entertainment, entertainment. Don’t you want to see what a newborn chick does against a Nakuma for the first time?”

“Yes, I understand.”

An Attacker laughed and walked towards a container in the base camp. He manipulated the door lock and it slid to one side.

“This is a Nakuma. This one is the weakest in the vicinity.”

Clem introduced as a metal object in the form of a spider walked out. The metal was the Nakuma, a type of robot zombie. It really suited the mechanical zombie label as it waddled awkwardly.

“If you can handle it alone then I will allow you to be an Attacker. How about it? Can you do it?”

“Of course.”

Ark attached a machine to his left eye and smiled. At the same time, his view turned green and blurry and he could clearly see the Nakuma.

Infrared Scope

Item Type: Vision support equipment

The infrared scope allows you to distinguish between

things clearly even at night. In addition, life detection capabilities have been loaded so you can recognize the combat capabilities of the enemy. This is an essential equipment for pioneers on the frontier.

- + Night vision
- + Enemy level confirmation

It was an equipment he purchased in the commercial area of Nephelim. The price was 5 gold. It was a taxing price but the infrared scope was the only way for users who hadn't received body coating to use 'night vision.' It also allowed him to confirm the enemy level and health. As stated in the information window, it was a necessity for beginner pioneers. He identified with the scope that the Nakuma was level 13. He wasn't an opponent for Ark who reached level 15 on R-14.

'The muddy ground? Ha! This might be my first time on the frontier but I'll show them that they can't ignore me. What is this? I am Ark. I'll show them what kind of user I am!'

Ark grasped his dagger with a confident look. Then the red ray of the Nakuma that was sweeping the area touched Ark.

-Life detected! It is an enemy! Remove it!

There was a beeping sound and the upper part of the Nakuma rotated. But Ark wasn't stressed. There was no need to be tense.

"Enemy? Heh, didn't your robot sensors identify that I'm stronger than you?"

Ark suddenly rushed towards the Nakuma and swung his dagger.

Ark's body glided across the swamp. It was the Swamp Walking he learnt from the Charenjok! This was the reason he chose Nephalim. The swamp south of Nephalim seemed like the best hunting ground for Ark.

“Huh! That guy, such movements on a swamp.....”

“He wasn't just talking nonsense when he mentioned the warrior's pride?”

Clem and the Attackers whistled with a surprised expression and started murmuring.

‘The surprising thing will be from now on. This is my first battle on the frontier! I'll show a hot performance!’

Lightning fast! It was his first battle since leaving R-14 so he charged in quickly. Then both arms of the Nakuma broke off and a bunch of pipe like objects popped out.

“Eh? W-wait! W-what is that? Guns?”

Ark burst out with confusion. The pipe like object was a Gatling gun that was commonly seen in war movies. Ark alternated between looking at his 20 cm dagger and the Nakuma's gun.

“H-hey, is this a joke? It must be a decoration.....”

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

The Gatling gun started revolving and fiercely firing bullets.

“.....This isn't a joke!”

Ark hurriedly threw his body towards the ground and rolled. A bullet hit his thigh and he felt a sharp pain as well as losing 3% health.

“Ugh! Dammit, that gun! This is a trick!”

Ark stared at the Nakuma with an absurd expression. While selling items in Nephalim square, he had heard that fighting in Galaxian was trickier than other games. But who would've expected a level 13 monster shooting a machine gun? It would've been absurd in reality. However this was a game. One hit also reduced his health by 3%.

‘It is a machine gun. If I’m hit by a barrage of bullets then I will lost 20~30% health instantly.’

The opponent was 2 levels lower than him so he thought it would be easy. However.....

“Phew, isn’t this exhilarating?”

A smile flashed on Ark’s face. He had been living in medieval times so he panicked after seeing a gun. But if he thought about, it was very different and exciting. Using a gun was different from bows and magic. He had only experience archery and magic so he felt refreshed seeing a gun. Of course, he was still confident that he could deal with it.

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

Then the Gatling gun revolved and the Nakuma started firing again. Ark lifted his left arm and shouted.

“Shield!”

A blue light appeared from his wrist. The identity of the blue light was a transparent, hexagonal shaped shield! It was the high density energy shield that he received from Bhurad on R-14. Unlike

the medieval shield, this one could be worn as a bracelet and the glasslike surface even altered with the movement of the enemy.

Tting! Tting! Tting!

Once the shield expanded, sparks flew on the surface and the bullets bounced back. Of course, the energy of the shield was reduced but the value wasn't that big. The energy was only decreased by 1% every time it was hit. The graphic effect of the shield was different when it blocked the bullets compared to the space bugs but it still blocked the damage. Of course, it was a Gatling gun so he couldn't just ignore it.....

‘I'm not going to politely be hit by the bullets.’

Ark held up his shield and rushed towards the Nakuma. The Nakuma fired blindly but Ark moved in a zigzag pattern and it didn't hit. Fortunately Ark could approach the Nakuma without receiving any damage. Ark appeared under the Nakuma's nose and laughed.

“It's my turn now. You machine zombie!”

Snap!

Blue sparks flew when he swung his dagger. It was the first time Ark saw it but he could understand the source of the blue sparks. When looking through the infrared scope, the Nakuma had two life force gauges. One red and one blue. The attack just then had decreased the blue gauge. He heard in Nephalim that this was the shield gauge that all androids had. He was surprised about the 2 gauges but the blue one quickly decreased by 15%. It was a surprisingly weak shield.

‘Well the opponent is a level 13 monster.’

Ark’s confidence rose as the shield gauge gradually reduced. Furthermore, the battle situation had instantly changed. The Gatling gun fired 10 bullets at once. However, there was a long gap between shots. So the Nakuma was almost defenseless after firing a round. Therefore Ark managed to start a close combat fight with his dagger that was disadvantageous to a gun battle. It became monotonous once he discovered the attack pattern of firing the Gatling gun.

“This is fighting with just a dagger and no skills?”

It had been a long time since Ark experienced a tedious fight like this.

Snap, snap, snap!

He thrust his dagger from side to side while dodging and the Nakuma’s shield was eventually crushed to pieces. Now the only thing left was the health!

“I’ll turn you into scrap iron and will sell you to the junkyard!”

Ark quickly moved from side to side and attacked. And.....confusion appeared on Ark’s face.

“W-what is this? It barely reduced any health?”

One attack had decrease 15% of the shield’s durability. Therefore Ark had expected to decrease the Nakuma’s health by a similar amount. However, those attacks had only reduced it by 10%. It meant each strike only did 3~4% damage.

‘Then the body has higher defense than the shield?’

Ark had learnt taekwondo for several years so close combat was his specialty. Ark had showed sufficient battle sense and used close combat fighting while avoiding the Nakuma's attacks. Despite his evasion, he still received some damage. He didn't have any skills yet so he had to expect a certain level of damage. He had lost 40% health. By the time he destroyed one of the gauges, his health was on 50%. He had calculated that he could defeat the Nakuma as the battle progressed. However, the defensive power of the main body was even higher than the shield. Then he received huge damage to his side. He was in a defenseless state and 10% health was cut!

‘I made a mistake. I have no chance in a frontal confrontation. I can't win!’

The most basic ability for users was being able to determine victory or defeat in a user. If he only had 1 health left then it was likely the user would run away to increase changes of survival. However, this battle wasn't simply a problem of whether he lived or died. This was to determine whether he could become an Attacker instead of a Scavenger so he could earn 200 gold and experience! It wasn't a battle he could run away from.

‘I have to endure until the end even if I die!’

Bbok!

Ark attached an octopus to his head. It was the Charenjok's Token that healed 1 health every 3 seconds for 10 minutes! Bbok! Bbok! Bbok! Bbok!

-You have recovered 1 health.
-You have recovered 1 health.....

His health was restored little by little.

‘That’s it. If this is attached then my odds will increase a little bit!’

Ark rotated his body and kicked the Nakuma’s back. He thought he could paralyze the Nakuma for a second but....it was a tremendous mistake.

-You have hit an android and injured your leg.

<Your leg is fractured and your movement speed will reduce by 30%>

Ark was the one damaged instead! The android was a machine so kicking metal would obviously injure the man. The collision ended up injuring his leg. Ark never thought the laws of physics would be applied and it ended up a disaster! Ark collapsed to the ground because of the shock from his injury and the Nakuma swung a blade towards Ark’s chest.

‘Dammit! I’m screwed!’

Ark looked at the Nakuma’s blade with hopeless eyes.

Tung-!

There was a roaring sound from behind him. The back of the Nakuma’s head exploded and it stumbled to one side. Ark reflexively turned his head and his mouth widened. Clem was kneeling approximately 10 metres behind Ark with a cigar in his mouth. The deafening sound came from the rifle he was holding and the rifle then fired again.

Tung-! Tung-! Tung-!

Whenever the blast occurred, there was an explosion to the back of the Nakuma's head. The Nakuma received several shots from the rifle and struggled weakly in the mud.

“Do you now grasp the situation, Scavenger?”

Clem put away his rifle and smiled at Ark.

“You seem to have some skill with sword fighting. But this isn't the medieval age. Who would risk their lives with a dagger these days? Now, listen carefully. Direct strike weapons like swords are effective against shields. But you're screwed if you attach the body of a mechanical creature like the Nakuma with a sword. Just like now.”

Cheolkong! Pushu!

Clem pulled out the bullet casing for his rifle and said.

“This is called resistance. The original shield is a form of energy so projectile weapons won't deal damage to it. The trajectory of the projectile will just bounce off the shield. On the other hand, it is weak to melee weapons like swords or maces. On the opposite side, the metal body of an android is strong against projectiles and is weak to bullets. Therefore pioneers must carry two types of weapons by default. Do you understand why you are still too early to be a warrior?”

Ark now understood the situation. He thought the users carrying guns and swords in the city just wanted to look cool. Ark thought they were foolish at the time. In online games, weapon proficiency was just as important as levels. Therefore it was common to use on one weapon series. But users were already using two or three

weapons from the beginning of the game so he thought they didn't know the basics of online gaming. However, Ark was the one who didn't know the basics.

“Do you understand why you're a Scavenger?”

Clem didn't have anything more to say and turned his body.

“W-wait a minute!”

“What? You still have business left?”

“Rather than business.....yes, it was my fault for not knowing basic things like that. But if I know the problem then I can resolve it! One more! Give me one more chance! I also have a gun! I will use ammunition now.....”

Ark quickly took out a pistol from his bag. Ark had bought 17 weapons from R-14. He had sold 14 but of the 3 remaining, one of them was a gun. He held out a revolver!

-Revolver

Item Type: Gun

Wearer Restriction: Level 10

Attack: 10~15

Durability: 30/30

Number of Ammunition: 6

A commonly used handgun in the universe. Firearms are more advanced than swords but shields can block the bullets so it isn't universally used. However, it is possible to penetrate a shield with steady long distance attacks so guns have been used more often in recent years. The revolver is a pistol made for beginners so

the performance isn't that good but the bullets are readily available and it is reliable.

However, Clem still wasn't impressed.

“Pistol.....and a handgun that you've never used before.....”

Clem scratched his head and sighed.

“Now, this is your last chance. If you hit 2 out of 3 shots then I will place you as an Attacker.”

It was an abrupt suggestion but Ark had already failed so he had no choice.

‘Well, I’ve seen a lot of shooting in movies and dramas.’

He held a pose like the character of a movie and pulled the trigger. However.....

Tang-!

-Your attack has failed!

Tang-!

-Your attack has failed!

“Eh? Huh? What is this?

Ark asked with a befuddled look. The distance was a mere 10 metres. Ark had clearly made sure the aim was correct before pulling the trigger. Yet the bullet flew to the wrong spot and hit the dirt. Then the watching Attackers giggled.

“He is a Scavenger.”

“Ah, no this isn’t.....”

“Hey, squirt.”

Clem blew out smoke from his cigarette and frowned at Ark.

“Do you think a gun is so easily to handle that a child can use it? In fact, most people only have a 40% hit rate the first time they use a rifle. You are 10 years too early to use a pistol. And a guy who can’t even handle a gun can’t be an Attacker in Silver Hand. Do you understand? I already gave you two chances and you failed. Stop being a troublemaker, Scavenger.”

Clem said bluntly before turning around.

“The entertainment is over! All Scavengers pack the equipment for the Attackers. We are going Nakuma hunting!”

“Yay yay! Yes!”

The warriors raised their weapons and cheered. Ark was forced to become a Scavenger who searched through the mud for loot.

“Dammit!”

A man spat on the ground and cursed. Four guys in the vicinity ran up to him.

“Hyung-nim, are you alright?”

“Am I okay? Do you think I’ve broken something?”

“No, that’s not it.....”

“Damn, that bastard! I won’t let it go!”

The man who cursed was the leader of the gang, Mald. Thanks to

Ark's trick with the assault, Mald was jailed for 2 hours before a bail of 30 gold was paid and he was released. Of course it was impossible for him to feel good. No, the situation was enough for him to stamp around angrily.

“Look for him.”

Mald growled towards his henchmen.

“He is still a beginner. He can't leave Nephalim. So look for him using whatever method possible! If you can find him then just give up on the game!”

“Huh? Yes! U-understood!”

The henchmen scattered at Mald's cruel words.

While Mald's henchmen were searching through Nephalim.

Pilpeak, pilpeak, pilpeak.

Ark sighed as he searched through the mud.

“It is disgraceful to be searching through the mud after arriving at the frontier.”

Of course he wasn't happy. No, the situation made him furious. Fortunately, Clem wasn't a wicked employer like Tori. Clem's primary source of income was the reward from the federation after disposing of the Nakuma. It was also possible to gain an income from the metal parts that the Nakuma dropped. So Clem distributed the income fairly equally based on the number of metal parts. But the problem was the number of Silver Hands. The Silver Hand consisted of 15 Attackers and 5 Scavengers. It was impossible

to give a lot of metal parts when distributing it between 20 people. Furthermore, he wasn't just given the fee. Loot distribution was essentially based on contribution. Those with more contribution will be given more rewards. The Attackers risked their lives in battle so they obviously received more than the Scavengers. The basic outline was that the Attackers received 5% of the total loot while the Scavengers received 2~3%. If 100 parts were picked up then that was only 2~3 pieces.

“But it isn't a small number considering I get loot at the end of every battle.”

Ark looked at the truck parked near him. The Silver Hand's hunting method was pursuit. The Scavenger Heksu explained about the Silver Hand while they were collecting.....

“If the Nakuma is in a crisis then it will transmit radio waves to all colleagues in the area. If the Attackers are fighting the Nakuma then they will install a device to amplify the radio waves by a few hundred times. Then all Nakuma within a few kilometres will gather. Usually they hunt 200 in 1~2 hours? The Attackers will dispose of all Nakuma and then move on to the next hunting grounds.”

Then the Scavenger would search the hunting ground and gather all loot in the trucks before riding it to follow the Attackers. Sometimes they obtained more than 100 loot from a hunting ground! They hunted without breaks so 2~3% wasn't a small amount!

‘Experience.....’

Ark wouldn't get any experience even if hundreds of Nakuma were killed. Furthermore, the loot he gathered by digging through the mud would enter the mouth of a hamster. Well, it was in order to learn a skill but he couldn't help being mad. He also didn't know when this would end if he only received 2~3% of the metal.

‘Dammit, a gun! If only I could use a gun properly!’

Ark was confident in close combat. But marksmanship was indispensable when fighting against android type monsters! Ark couldn't abandon his regret of not becoming an Attacker and sometimes practiced his marksmanship. It was to the extent that he got blisters on his fingers!

However! However!

Tang-!

-Your attack has failed!

Tang-!

-Your attack has failed!

The shooting kept on failing!

‘As expected, I'm not talented in shooting.’

Ark understood that this was an unexpected weakness for him.

“Hey! Ark, until when are you going to keep on playing around? There is still a mountain of work to do. The Scavengers are a team. If you play around then everyone else will have more work. If I report it to Clem then he will decrease your share.”

Heksu snapped at him. In the end, Ark had no choice but to reconsider his idea.

‘Galaxian is set in the future so there will be quite a few androids. The city guards are also androids. So it is imperative that I learn marksmanship....but I have to put it on hold for the moment. The urgent problem is learning the hacking skill and breaking the relationship with that damn hamster. So it is important that I gather metal parts worth 200 gold. I’m not an Attacker but 2~3% is still a lot of metal components.’

When calculating the Silver Hand’s distribution system, 20% of the total income remains. This 20% was distributed according to performance. The Scavenger that worked hard and helped the Silver Hand then most would receive a special bonus.

‘If I can’t be an Attacker then I should aim for that bonus!’

Their aim was to increase efficiency. Ark was also the same. His attitude changed 180 degrees now that he had a concrete goal.

“I’ve received a notification from Clem that the battle is over. Now let’s go collect the loot!”

The 5 Scavengers moved at Heksu’s order towards the battle location. When he arrived at the battlefield, hundreds of wreckage from the Nakuma was on the ground. But most of the metal parts were buried in mud that reached the ankles. This was the reason for the Scavengers. The metal parts buried in the mud weren’t easy to find. But the Attackers tirelessly hunted without any breaks and needed to move to the next area. The circumstances changed once Ark started earnestly working.

“Swamp Walking!”

Sasasasa! Sasasasa!

He could easily walk through the swamp with Swamp Walking. Ark flew about the mud like an octopus and raked in the loot. Ark found 3~4 pieces in the time it took for the Scavengers to find 1. So the efficiency increased by a few times. That wasn't all. The Scavenger's job wasn't just to find metal components. The Nakuma's body were basically discarded machine parts. So it would turn black when buried in the mud for too long. So the Scavengers also had to wash the goods. This was an area where Ark's skill shone.

“Facilities Maintenance!”

Buduk! Buduk! Buduk! Flash!

Facilities Maintenance increased cleaning and oiling by 30%! He learnt the skill from cleaning kilometres of pipes on R-14. Therefore Ark managed to clean the loot a few times faster than the other Scavengers.

‘I hate to admit it.....’

It was sad but Ark's skills were optimized for a Scavenger. Anyway, even Heksu was amazed by Ark's incredible speed and he interjected.

“Ohh! A-amazing!”

Heksu was amazed by Ark's hidden ability and grasped his hand before saying.

“The movement that flies freely around the swamp! The cleaning

skill that makes dirty metal components gleam! This is it! You're the person I've been waiting for! How about it? Do you want to use this chance to become a professional Scavenger? I'll make you my successor. The Scavenger is quite a deep world when you look closely. In fact, I was also an excellent pioneer before I became a Scavenger. When I was young I attended a school to fly around space as a pioneer. I will teach you all of my knowledge. Wouldn't it be a shame to waste such amazing talents?"

-Heksu, the leader of the Silver Hand Scavengers has offered to make you his successor.

If you accept then you will change occupations to a 'Scavenger.'

Would you like to accept?

An offer to become Heksu's successor! Most users couldn't choose a profession until they became level 30 and received a body coating. There was only a process to determine the basic tendencies, like a warrior or long-range attacker. Galaxian also didn't have special training facilities to select an occupation. The only way to obtain an occupation was through specific events or conditions there were normally hidden classes in other games. Therefore most of the early stages of Galaxian could be described as the process of finding an occupation. However, there was no guarantee that an occupation would be discovered. There was no guarantee even if the user was level 100.

'But the first occupation I found in Galaxian is related to

cleaning.....’

Finding an occupation in Galaxian is as difficult as grabbing a star from the sky. But I don’t want an occupation following behind NPCs and picking up their loot!’

“I don’t think that Scavenger is an occupation that can be ignored. However, I am a warrior like I said before. I’m thankful for Heksu-nim’s offer but I can’t accept as thanks to my inability to let go of my warrior state. One day I’ll become a fine warrior but I won’t forget and will come back to visit.”

Ark left room to accept. He didn’t feel regret over refusing the Scavenger occupation. But Heksu was in charge of the Scavengers so it would be difficult if he started disliking Ark.

“It can’t be helped. Yes, it is different from being able to do the job with a light heart.”

Heksu clicked his tongue and nodded. However, he still didn’t give up. He continued to buzz around Ark and kept on creating chances for Ark to accept being his successor. Thanks to Heksu’s interest, Ark’s Swamp Walking and Facilities Maintenance reached intermediate level.

“It is a waste to throw away talent despite the lingering attachment to a warrior.....”

Ark was inconvenienced by his interest. And he spent 3 days gathering loot and fending off Heksu’s courtship. Ark was mechanically searching the mud when he was faced with an unexpected incident. The incident started from a single cry of distress.

“Heok! T-this....ugh!”

‘What? Did someone fall into the swamp?’

Ark thought it wasn’t important. This was a swamp so some places reached his ankles while others were deeper. The appearance was difficult to tell so sometimes the Scavengers would fall in and struggle. That’s why the Scavengers never searched alone. Ark thought it was a commonplace occurrence and continued searching for metal parts. But the next moment!

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

‘Shots fired!’

Ark turned his head with surprise. He saw 3 Nakuma covered in mud and firing their Gatling guns? The Nakuma had appeared at a place that the Attackers had already hunted.

“W-why is the Nakuma in a place like this.....?”

“D-dammit! Debris!”

Heksu screamed from far away. The Nakuma combined with machine parts to become a mechanical living being. If they weren’t completely destroyed then sometimes they would just behave like they were dead. Those guys would then act like magnets to attract nearby metal parts to restore themselves. They were called Debris.

‘But Debris never occurred before?’

The Attackers always searched around for Debris before moving on to the next hunting ground. Therefore Ark had heard about Debris from Heksu but never seen it. However, this time 3 Debris appeared.

‘They’ve been marching too unreasonably since yesterday.’

The Silver Hand had been hunting the Nakuma in the swamp for three days. Therefore the container on the truck was filled with 95% metal. They wanted to reach the end so they moved faster. So unlike yesterday, Clem had started rushing the hunting. No matter how much they rushed, the Attackers still searched for Debris but they must’ve missed something.....

‘This isn’t the time for thinking!’

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

The three Debris enthusiastically fired their Gatling guns. The Scavengers had almost no combat power. They screamed as they were hit by the bullets.

“Ugh! Send a request for the Attackers to return and hide behind the truck!”

Heksu and the Scavengers hurled the metal parts and ran behind the truck. Ark was the same. Ark was further away from the other Scavengers but he quickly headed towards the truck thanks to Swamp Walking.

“Ark, faster! Hurry up! Ugh!”

Heksu screamed and sat down. While he was gathering the Scavengers, Heksu had been hit by the bullets. Once Heksu collapsed, a Debris approached him with a blade.

‘.....Damn!’

Ark rushed forward. Over the past 3 days, Heksu had properly trained Ark despite his nagging to become his successor. How

could he just let a NPC like that be killed right in front of him? Ark turned and fired the revolver.

Tang-!

-Your attack has failed!

The natural message stating that he failed had appeared. Ark couldn't even hit a target 10 metres away let alone the Debris that was dozens of metres away. However, that wasn't the reason Ark fired the gun. It was to attract the Debris' eyes. The Debris flinched when Ark fired. It subsequently fired at him.

Tu tu tu tu! Tu tu tu tu!

“Shield!”

The bullets hit Ark's shield. Ark narrowed the distance using Swamp Walking and wielded his dagger.

Snap!

Sparks appeared as he hit rough iron. The Debris had been destroyed and revived so it didn't have a shield. It also had 30% health left. But unlike the Nakuma Ark fought the other day, this one was level 30! It was 15 levels higher than Ark. Moreover, a melee weapon couldn't damage a metal creature and it only lost 1% health.

‘I can't beat this guy with a dagger!’

Ark stepped on the Debris' leg joint and jumped over.

“Heksu, catch!”

“A-Ark!”

Heksu who was grabbing his bloody legs stretched out his arm with surprise. Ark grabbed that arm as he landed and shot forward like an arrow. This was the reason Ark intervened. It was to attract the Debris' attention and then rescue Heksu! Ark pulled Heksu and ran forward as the Debris fired its Gatling gun.

‘It’s difficult to avoid the guns but.....’

Ping-! Ping-! Ping-! Ping-!

His Swamp Walking reached intermediate after spending three days in the swamp! Therefore his speed increased and his evasion reached 20%. Ark used evasion movements and avoided most of the bullets. Of course, he couldn’t avoid everything but only a few hit him before he hid behind the truck. The Scavengers gathered around as he arrived.

“Heksu-nim! Ark!”

“Ark, you saved me!”

Heksu grasped Ark’s hand with a pale face.

“It was a natural thing to do as colleagues. What do we do now?”

“A request for help was sent to Captain Clem. We can only wait until the Attackers arrive.”

“How long will that take?”

“The answer hasn’t been confirmed yet. Wait a moment. Huk!”

Heksu trembled after manipulating the Nymphe.

“Right now the Attackers are hunting so it will take them 10 minutes to clean up and return.”

“10 minutes? I-isn’t that a serious problem?”

The Scavengers cried out and Ark tilted his head to one side before asking.

“Can’t we endure if we use the truck as a cover?”

“No, this truck is the problem. The Nakuma is an existence that collects metal parts in the swamp. That is why all the Nakuma are different sizes. The ones that collect more mechanical parts are larger and stronger. And this truck contains thousands of metal parts that we’ve collected from 3 days of hunting the Nakuma. If those guys capture the truck before the Attackers get here.....”

Kwa kwang! Kwa kwang!

There was a roar and the truck shook. The 3 Debris were pouring attacks from the opposite side of the truck. Heksu moaned as the truck shook.

“Oh my god! Those guys know what is inside the truck!”

“If they combine with the metal parts in the container.....”

“We’re screwed! They’ll become even bigger and stronger!”

The Scavengers grabbed their heads and exclaimed. However, Ark’s scream was different from theirs. The container was filled with metal parts. The Debris would obviously form huge monsters if they got those parts. The Scavengers and maybe even Clem and the Attackers might not be able to handle them. However, Ark had a different worry. The Nakuma combined with metal parts. They could also reclaim metal parts. Only some metal parts would drop. The rest would just disappear. In other words, if they absorbed all

of the metal in the container then some would disappear for good.

‘I will lose all the metal parts I collected!’

The metal he spent three days gathering would fly away. That’s what Ark was afraid of.

Kwa kwang! Kwadududuk!

Once again a banging sound was heard against the outer wall of the container. Ark and the Scavengers jumped with surprise. The Debris were aiming towards the container to obtain the metal parts. There were only a few metres left before they would break through. Heksu and the Scavengers were still pulling at their hair. They didn’t even have weapons and they couldn’t fight. The only one who could do something was Ark!

‘.....I have no choice!’

Ark grabbed his revolver and dagger. There were 3 Debris. Their health was only 30% but they were still level 30. In the meantime, Ark was still level 15. He also couldn’t use the gun properly to deal damage to the Debris.

‘The odds are against me. But I might be able to lure them away from the truck with Swamp Walking. Yes, that’s the only way. All my efforts of the past three days will be undone if the container is broken. It is better to die to ensure that the truck survives!’

Ark grinded his teeth and prepared to exit from behind the truck. Suddenly a hand sprang out from the mud underneath the truck and grabbed his ankles. Ark was dragged underneath the truck as was able to identify the arm.

“Debris!”

A Debris had slipped underneath the truck! The Debris pulled Ark using one arm and attacked using a blade.

‘Oh, no! In this state it is likely to be a critical hit!’

Ark was distressed and instinctively fired his revolver at the Debris. Smoke covered the Debris’ head and a message window appeared.

-Headshot!

<You have inflicted a serious blow and the Debris will receive additional 150% damage>

A headshot occurred when the bullet hit the head! But the message wasn’t reflected in Ark’s eyes.

“I-it hit!”

Over the past three days, Ark had practiced shooting until he got blisters and he never hit a target. But now he hit something. And it was the difficult headshot! Ark stared at the smoking Debris with stunned eyes.

“Oh my god! What on earth.....?”

“Ark, it’s dangerous!”

Heksu screamed as he looked under the truck. The Debris pulling him was wielding its blade again. There was no room to avoid with the position Ark was in. But fear didn’t appear on Ark’s face. Ark

pulled the trigger of the revolver as the blade flew towards him.

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

The shots were fired and the Debris' arm broken. The ensuring shots hit the Debris in the head and the shoulder. Smoke appeared again from the headshot!

‘I found it! A way to shoot and always hit the target!’

An exhilarating sensation swept through his body.

‘I’m so stupid! I wasn’t trying to learn marksmanship for long distance attacks. I couldn’t damage the Nakuma and Debris with the dagger. There is no reason to shoot the gun from a distance. The point is hitting them with the bullet. So it isn’t necessary to stay 10 metres away to hit the can. If you can’t hit from a distance of 10 metres.....’

“I will shoot from a distance that will guarantee a hit!”

Ark touched the revolver to the head of the struggling Debris. He pulled the trigger and there were continuous headshots. If the muzzle was forced to the head then it was impossible to miss. This was the method of marksmanship that Ark discovered.

-Your level has risen!

With that enlightening, Ark reached level 16 after 3 days. Ark became more inspired to fight the Debris after levelling up.

‘I can do it!’

Ark slipped out from under the truck and approached a Debris.

Kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang, kwa kwang!

Two Debris were still attacking the side of the truck. The outer wall of the container was already crumpled like tissue paper.

‘There’s no time left. I have to stop these guys!’

Ark headed towards the back of a Debris and pulled the trigger.

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

The Debris’ health went straight down from the continuous headshots. The Debris turned towards Ark and started fighting. This was different from the fight underneath the truck. The Debris’ movements were restricted under the truck so it couldn’t evade properly. It was easy to hit a target that stood still. However, this Debris was different.

It swung both its arms in an attack that was difficult to avoid at close range.

‘But.....I am Ark!’

He was a legend with a sword in one virtual reality game. Close combat was Ark’s battle territory!

Hwing! Hwing! Hwing! Hwing!

Ark avoided the blade with quick movements and pushed the muzzle of the gun to the Debris’ body.

“I’m sorry but I’ve seen everything.”

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

The Debris’ health was sucked out from the ensuing attacks. The Debris was resurrected with only 30% health. It was impossible with a dagger but it collapsed after just 3 minutes of being hit by bullets. But Ark wasn’t fine. Ark was an expert in close combat but

he was still level 16. His Swamp Walking might've increased evasion but he still received a lot of damage.

Cheolkeok, susususuk.

Furthermore, the revolver only allowed 6 bullets at a time so he needed to reload a few times in battle. Therefore he had lost 70% health.

‘But now there is only one Debris remaining. If I focus a bit more during battle.....’

Ark turned towards the last Debris.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa kwa!

While he had been attacking its colleague, the Debris had been continuously firing at the container. There was a roar and the outer wall was destroyed. The metal parts in the container started flying towards the Debris like they were being attracted by a magnet. Then the Debris grew from 2 metres to 5 metres?

-Level 30....level 32....level 34.....

The level of the Debris through the infrared scope started climbing. It became stronger by absorbing the metal parts!

‘Oh my god! It is already that strong from dozens of metal parts.....’

If it absorbed the thousands of metal pieces then it would literally be a monster. Even if they managed to kill it, most of the metal would disappear.

‘No! I have to stop it!’

Ark rushed towards the Debris without thinking. He narrowed

the distance with Swamp Walking and pulled the trigger when the muzzle was placed to the back of its head. The revolver fired out a bullet. The Debris wobbled from the headshot but only for a moment.

-Roaaaaar!

The Debris turned its huge body and swung its blade. It was a huge body. Ark hurriedly stepped back but he was still hit. Ark grabbed his side and moaned as the blade descended again.

‘What a tremendous attack! If I’m hit directly then I’ll die!’

The distressed Ark formed an X with the gun and dagger and blocked the attack. That was a mistake. The opponent was a 5 metres machine. The impact from such a huge body felt like his shoulders had broken. Ark was forced into the swamp as the blade pressed down. The defense posture stopped the blade but.....

‘Ugh! D-dammit! M-move!’

Ark had trouble even breathing thanks to that attack. There was no way he could throw off the monster and escape. That wasn’t the only problem.

-Level 36....level 38....level 40.....

The metal parts were still continuously being absorbed by the Debris. Every time the Debris’ size increased, the weight on him became even heavier.

‘Wrong. Is it going to end here.....?’

Hopelessness appeared on Ark’s face.

Pepepepeng!

There was a series of explosions from the back of the Debris' head. The shocked Debris stumbled and the pressure on his body disappeared. Ark rolled his body away and looked at the direction the noise came from. A group of warriors was approaching from one direction.

“This is the second time.”

In the lead was Clem!

“Captain Clem! The Attackers had arrived!”

Heksu and the Scavengers popped out from behind the truck. Clem looked at them before turning to Ark.

“But this time I feel compelled to say thank you. Thank you, squirt. Now get some rest.”

Space 9: Invader

SPACE 9. Invader

<Gear> Tori's Ironworks.

From ships to small screws! All orders custom made!

“It’s only been 3 days?”

Ark looked at the sign with flashing eyes. It had been 3 times since he arrived at Nephelim and was tricked by the hamster into a sponsor contract and sold to a mercenary troop.

‘At that time I had wanted to shoot a bullet in the hamster’s head.....’

Now he changed his mind. He thought it was like human trafficking at first but the Silver Hand was a surprisingly excellent experience. Clem might have an intimidating experience but he is a friendly and kind NPC. The only complaint was the small salary. That was probably the reason why Clem wanted to hire a worker. However, that dissatisfaction was resolved with the incident last time.

“Hmm, it might be a Debris but you managed to defeat 2 of them by yourself. You might not have the skill of an Attacker but....we would’ve lost all the parts we gathered in 3 days if it wasn’t for you. You fixed our mistake so I should reward that. You will be an

Attacker for the next hunt. Hey, Attackers! Do you have any dissatisfaction about this youngster being an Attacker?”

“No!”

“Okay. Then Ark will become an Attacker in the next hunt!”

“Yay yay! Yes!”

He had been promoted to an Attacker. While this was what Ark wished for, Heksu had become grumpy. The Attackers received double the salary of the Scavengers. It was 5% of the dividend. He was able to receive 5% of the huge number of metal components gathered from the pursuit hunting. He also additionally got tremendous experience! Ark obtained even more from the Debris’ appearance.

-A new skill (Common Occupation ☆) has been learnt.

Close Marksmanship (User, Passive): An essential basic marksmanship technique in Galaxian.

Various guns can be used in Galaxian like rocket launchers, long range sniper rifle, shotguns, close range assault rifle, SMG (Sub machine gun) and portable hand guns. If you master the performance of a wide range of weapons at 100% then the probability of survival on the frontier will increase.

<Close range hit rate will decrease by 5% while damage will increase by 10%>

Marksmanship was registered as a skill after the battle with the Debris.

“Plus.....”

Ark sent a warm look towards his heavy bag. The Silver Hand had collected about 2,500 metal parts in three days. Original Ark worked as a Scavenger so he only received a 2% share. That was 50 pieces. But now Ark's bag contained 550 metal parts! Ark's achievement in killing the Debris was recognized and he received the 20% bonus metal parts. It was worth looking through the swamp for 3 days! Therefore he didn't feel like shooting Tori anymore. Of course, that didn't mean Ark was grateful. He was able to receive 100% results from the mercenary troops thanks to Ark's efforts. The hamster had just happily sold him. Furthermore, Ark was deceived with his sweet talk and entered a provisional contract of 200 gold.....

‘I might not want to shoot him but I can still kick his fat stomach! But I can learn the hacking skill and then terminate the contract. Until then I just have to endure it. It won't take a long time now that I'm an Attacker.’

Ark imagined kicking the hamster as he entered Gear.

-Critical Hit! You have received a surprise attack!

He felt an impact to his side and a red warning message appeared.

“Huk! W-what is this?”

Ark grabbed his bleeding side and turned his head with surprise. And some guys flocked out of the junkyard and pushed Ark. Ark

fell down and raised his head with surprise.

“Y-you.....”

“Didn’t I tell you? I’ll make you regret it.”

“..... Mald!”

Ark glared at Mald. He was the gangster who confronted Ark at the plaza and was arrested by the androids. Mald shook his dagger as blood fell and growled.

“Bastard! Do you know how long we’ve been looking for you?”

“Ugh, you.....are you crazy? This is a city. This.....”

“City? Heh, do you think I care about my reputation anymore? It doesn’t matter if I become chaotic inside the city or outside. It won’t change. You miscalculated if you thought I would leave you alone. It doesn’t matter if I end up in prison as long as I can kill you.”

“A visitor? Are you a visitor?”

The Tori entered the junkyard. His eyes widened as he saw Ark bleeding heavily.

“Eh? Ark? And.....blood? What, what the?”

“Don’t you know him?”

Mald angrily stared at Tori. Tori looked wildly between Ark and Mald and said.

“Oh, no! I-I don’t know! I don’t know him at all!”

“Then get lost!”

“Yes! Yes! I’ll do that! So please take care of that quickly!”

Tori turned around and quickly left.

‘That damn bastard.....!’

Ark glared at the back of the hamster’s head.

“This is the ideal chance. We’ve been waiting for you in front of Nephalim’s gate. Because you’ll have no choice but to pass through the gate. And I finally found you in the vicinity of the gate a short time ago. But do you know the reason we followed you to this place? You haven’t registered with the fairy yet.”

Ark cringed at the end of Mald’s words. Ark had returned to Nephalim but he hadn’t registered with the Fairy yet. He was in the city so he thought he didn’t need to hurry.

“You seem to have been hunting quite a bit while avoiding us. And you ate quite a bit of experience? Therefore if you die before registering with the Fairy then you’ll be completely turned into jelly.”

It had been three days since he had encountered Mald and his gang. No, Ark had completely forgotten about Mald until now. He had gained almost no experience while working as a Scavenger. He gained a level from defeating the Debris but it wasn’t that much experience. Dying then would’ve been okay.....

“So we waited for a good opportunity for a deserted place. If you’re here then you will die before the androids arrive.”

Mald shook his dagger and stepped closer to him. The 4 henchmen also surrounded Ark. 5 thugs were encircling him with knives! And Ark.....

“Hah, you guys really are boring. It doesn’t matter if it’s inside the city or outside? You want to kill me? You seem to be using your head a little bit. If you kill me then all 5 of you will be chaotic? Isn’t that common sense? Won’t you rot in a prison cell if you become chaotic? Yet it is fine? It is huge damage no matter how you think about it.”

“Don’t be cocky. Don’t tell me you’ve already forgotten? I was locked up for 2 hours and wasted 30 gold already. No, I don’t care about money. You stirred the wrong opponent. Don’t think it will end with one time. I will continue to kill you in the hunting grounds and the city until you quit the game.”

“Try it.”

Then a voice filled with laughter was heard from behind him. Mald turned around with confusion and paled.

“What, what the? These guys.....”

“This punk doesn’t have any manners. You should spend some time with adults.”

The person smoking a cigarette and speaking was Clem, the leader of Silver Hand! And 15 people aiming their rifles at Mald’s gang were standing behind Clem. They were the reason why Ark was calm. Ark was still a part of the Silver Hand. The Silver Hand had only returned to Nephalim because the contained was filled with 3 days of hunting and in order to replenish their supplies. While Clem went to visit the federation to receive the reward for hunting Nakuma, Ark had gone to Tori to learn the first part of the hacking skill. Clem then went to the junkyard to repair the broken

container and procure supplies. Mald had messed with him on the wrong day.

“He is a member of our unit. I particularly feel a strong attachment to him.”

Clem blew smoke towards the confused Mald. And he glanced at Ark.

“Hey squirt, did they attack first?”

“Yes.”

Ark laughed and shrugged. Galaxian had the same basic rules as other online games. In other words, if the opponent attacked first then he wouldn't become chaotic if he killed them. The names of Mald and his gang had turned grey after attacking Ark. Clem laughed and nodded.

“It is self-defense.”

Cheolkeok! Cheolkeok! Cheolkeok! Cheolkeok!

At the same time, the 15 Attackers loaded their guns. It was a total of 15 guns. Despair appeared on the faces of Mald's gang. And just as the 15 guns were about to fire!

“Wait a minute.”

Ark had been thinking for a while and he stood up while raising his hand. He approached Mald who was pale and sweating.

“To be honest I don't really care what happens to you. But I don't want you to bother me the whole time I'm playing Galaxian. So how about we reconcile? Of course it's not just a reconciliation. Weren't you eager for the toy before? Do you still want the toy?”

“That....yes.”

Ark eyes lit up at Mald's words. However, he nodded like he was oblivious and said.

“I don't understand why you want such a toy but I'll give it to you at a cheap price. Will you promise to forget our bad relationship?”

“A cheap price.....how much?”

“60 gold.”

“What? 6-60 Gold? Are you making fun of me?”

“Eh? Didn't I tell you before? The original price is 100 gold. I already discounted 10 gold and I'll take away 30 gold because of the bail fee. Isn't that a cheap price?”

“B-but.....”

“Did you want a better price? There is no benefit for me.”

Ark interrupted Mald's words and retorted with an angry expression.

“This is the frontier. You can't revive for free. Each revival will cost at least 20 gold. Five times is 100 gold. And can't you see? You guys talked about revenge but I'm a member of the mercenary troop. Do you really think you can get revenge? In the end you will just die an embarrassing death. Isn't 60 gold a good price to clean up the bad feelings? You will also get the toy you desire.”

“T-that....”

Mald stuttered and glared at Ark.

But Ark knew. Mald had no choice but to accept. That guy obviously knew that there was something hidden in the toy. If there was a chance to obtain it then he would accept. Besides, if he rejected then the death penalty would be 100 gold. He had no other choice.

“O-okay. That should be sufficient.”

Mald finally nodded after struggling. He gave 60 gold for the toy and ran out of the junkyard. However, Mald was unaware of one thing. Ark had already removed the memory chip from the toy. In the future he might come after Ark again.....

“Those stupid bastards.”

Ark laughed as he held the 60 gold.

‘Ark.....!’

A blond young man looked at the electric bulletin board with a complicated expression. The same message was still floating on R-14’s electric bulletin board.

Achievement: The first mission related master of R-14 has been born. <Ark>

It was the message that caused chaos among the users of R-14. The name Ark had already become a legend among gamers. So they speculated that the registered person was the same Ark. But they came to the conclusion that it was a different user. Ark was the stronger person who reigned over New World and he was also the advisor so there was no way he would play a competitor’s game.

However, the blonde youth knew. He didn’t understand the

reason but the legendary gamer Ark had come to Galaxian. And.....

‘That is clearly Ark.’

The blond youth was sure about it. Ark had just started and his name was being announced in Galaxian. It might be a famous name but the user wouldn’t possess that ability.

‘He.....Ark.....I must meet.’

That was the reason why the young man started Galaxian. And his heart started beating fast when he found Ark’s name on the bulletin board.

‘But.....’

He stared at his body with a gloomy look. In reality his body was lying down disabled in the unit. However, a character in a virtual reality game moved according to brain waves. A disability in reality wouldn’t be a problem. That was what he thought. However, he spent a year disabled so even his mind was affected. He had lived for more than 20 years but it felt like he was moving his arms and legs for the first time. It had only been 1 year. In the 1 year, he lost his natural movements. It took him a few hours just to raise his body. It took him a couple of tries to walk properly. He was a tycoon’s son, had a handsome appearance and an excellent education so he was used to receiving eyes of envy and longing. Yet the users frowned after seeing him barely able to talk on step. And he was engulfed in despair.

“What? You can’t even use a knife?”

“Why are you standing like that?”

“Ah, really! What is that? At least speak when someone is talking to you.”

“Ah, it can’t be helped. Hey, get rid of this guy.”

There were still a lot of users on R-14 so the farm areas were full. He had to wait several hours just to join a party. But his body couldn’t move properly and he still had trouble talking. Thus he was always kicked out of the party.

He was still level 1 despite several days passing.

‘As expected.....’

The blond youth sighed and shook his head.

‘No! I can’t give up yet!’

He tried to raise his body again. All of a sudden, a small alien approached him. The octopus ran a sucker down his should and said with a deliberately calm expression.

–Young man, do you want to raise your level?

He was the main character of the rumour secretly spread among the users of R-14! The president of the paid hunting ground, Burum.

“Captain-nim, there is another one at your 3 o’clock.”

“The numbers?”

“Around 10 of them.”

“That is only enough for a snack.”

Clem put out his cigar and shouted while lifting his rifle.

“Okay. Now it is time to finish it. Everybody! Let’s take care of

these guys!”

The Attackers turned their body towards the direction that Clem indicated. After a few minutes, several red lights appeared on the other side of the swamp. Around 10 mechanical life forms were approaching. Various machine parts to form a new creature! The SOS signal that the Nakuma broadcasted had been amplified many times by the Silver Hand. Thus the Nakuma approached from dozens of metres away!

“Murdock, now!”

Tung! Tung! Tung! Pajijiji!

A sphere buried in the mud emitted intense electromagnetic waves. Ark might have a handgun but the Silver Hand were experienced warriors with rifles. It was natural that they could deal damage to the Nakuma while hunting. However, they had difficulty with the Nakuma’s shield. So the Silver Hand used an electromagnetic mine!

-Electromagnetic Mine

Item Type: Mine (For Shield Removal)

A type of mine that works after being buried in the ground. The mine will emit a powerful electromagnetic energy in a 10 metre space and will remove the shield for 5 minutes. An explosives expert with the necessary skill is required in order to operate the electromagnetic mine.

<Electromagnetic energy will be emitted in a 10 metre space and the shield will be neutralized for 5 minutes>

An electromagnetic field that neutralized shields for 5 minutes! When the electromagnetic mine was activated, holes appeared in the Nakuma's shield and melted.

“Now, let's finish this!”

Tung-! Tung-! Tatatata! Tatatata!

The rifles and machine guns fired. The Nakuma responded but they had already been caught by the Attackers initiative. The bullets fired everywhere and 2 Nakuma started collapsing. The shootout continued for a few minutes.

“Captain-nim, 2 Nakuma are approaching from behind.”

“Sheesh, how annoying.”

When the Silver Hand amplified the SOS signal, the Nakuma didn't always come from a certain direction. The Nakuma normally communicated with 10~20 others through the radio waves but sometimes the Nakuma would approach from a different direction.

“Hey, squirt.”

Clem changed the magazine of his gun and turned.

“It is your turn. 2 of them....can you handle it?”

“Of course.”

The man with black hair who smiled was Ark! This was Ark's job

after becoming an Attacker.

Ark couldn't do long-distance shooting. He couldn't even hit an empty can 10 metres in front of him. That's why Ark took over the special duty. The Nakuma approached from a different area so they weren't hit by the electromagnetic mine. So Ark was in charge of taking care of them with close combat.

“I'll leave the back to you.”

“I'll take care of it quickly.”

At the same time, Ark used Swamp Walking to cross the area. He moved dozens of metres with Swamp Walking and 2 Nakuma entered his eyesight. He identified with the Infrared Scope that the Nakuma was level 25 and level 30. It was an opponent he wouldn't have been able to fight when he first entered Silver Hand. But it was a fortnight later and things had changed.

“Shield!”

Ark stopped the bullets with his shield and approached the Nakuma. And attacked with his dagger! Sparks flew every time the dagger hit and the Nakuma's shield was broken. Then the Nakuma's Gatling gun folded back and the blade appeared. Ark used his dagger to do an uppercut to the jaw and pressed his revolver there.

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

-Headshot!

<You have inflicted a serious blow and the Nakuma

will receive additional 150% damage>

The continuous shooting! Constant headshots! He had learnt Close Marksmanship after the incident with the Debris. Ark had been steadily practicing his marksmanship since entering the Attackers. And he had wasted hundreds of bullets.

‘I don’t have any talent in shooting!’

It was a waste of time to train in something he had no talent in. Of course, if he didn’t have talent then he needed to find another way or else he was bound to die. Marksmanship was an indispensable skill in Galaxian. And Ark had discovered another method. Close Marksmanship!

‘This is the only way for me to compete with mechanical life forms!’

At first that was his only use for marksmanship. But he changed his mind. Unlike regular marksmanship, close marksmanship could be used in close combat. And close combat was Ark’s style of fighting. Once he got the knack for it, he started to show power beyond his expectations.

‘This realization alone is worth joining the Silver Hand!’

In the last fortnight, Ark had practiced and was now an expert at this fighting style. And he hadn’t just polished his fighting skills. During the last fortnight, Ark had flown around more eagerly than anyone else and used his dagger and revolver. Thanks to that.....

| Character Information Window | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|-------|----|
| Name | Ark (R-02788) | Level | 27 |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|--------------|------------------|
| Species | Human | Occupation | Beginner Pioneer |
| Fame | 500 | | |
| Health | 500 (+15) | Mental Power | 250 |
| Strength | 75 (+3) | Agility | 115 |
| Stamina | 95 (+3) | Wisdom | 15 |
| Intelligence | 45 | Luck | 15 |
| * Title: Cleaning Foreman (Agility + 3) | | | |
| * Sponsor: Tori Ironworks ‘Gear’ (Contract) | | | |
| -Equipment Information- | | | |
| Weapons: <Modified Alloy Dagger>, Revolver> | | | |
| Equipment: <Bhurad’s Energy Shield> <Beginner’s Leather Jacket>, <Beginner’s Leather Pants> | | | |
| Secondary Equipment: <Infrared Scope>, <Charenjok’s Token>, <Cheksun’s Tool Box> | | | |

The smell of blood during the last fortnight.....no, it was the result of a battle with an oil smell. Thanks to the amplifier, the Silver Hand could hunt Nakuma for 1~2 hours without any breaks. Moreover, the Nakuma had a minimum level of 25. The level 16 Ark gained experience every time the Attackers fought so he quickly reached level 27. That was 12 levels in a fortnight. In addition, he was able to obtain some general leather equipment. Therefore Ark could easily fight against 2 level 30 Nakuma.

Tong-! Tang-! Tang-! Bam! Chwajijijiji!

“I have good eyes. I knew you would be a useful fellow.”

Clem looked at Ark fighting the Nakuma with warm eyes. The Attackers around him also nodded and said.

“That’s right. At first he didn’t understand Captain-nim and was just a newborn chick. Who would’ve expected that the newborn chick would gain such power over a fortnight?”

“It is because he was diligent.”

“Doesn’t he also clean our equipment when the battle ends and help the Scavengers as well? We’ve been hiring soldiers for many years but it is the first time I’ve seen someone so diligent.”

Just like the Attackers’ words, Ark didn’t rest at all after the battles. When the battle ended, he would use Facilities Maintenance to clean the Attackers’ equipment and he also went back to the rear to collect loot with the Scavengers. There was no one who would dislike a sincere person like that.

Therefore Ark had huge popularity in the Silver Hand. It was the inevitable result of not resting and doing the chores. However, Ark wasn’t popular just because he was sincere. The reason Ark was working for the Silver Hand was to learn the hacking skill! So it was essential that he earned 200 gold worth of metal parts. Of course, he obtained 5% of the metal parts but it was still difficult to gain 200 gold. That’s why Ark behaved diligently.

‘There is a 20% bonus!’

Once again, there was a part of the budget set aside for bonuses. Ark didn’t rest and continuously gained 1% of the bonus. As a

result, Ark managed to gain an average of 15% bonus. Including his basic salary, that was 20% of the total metal parts! So his bag became full with metal parts.

‘If it wasn’t for Heksu then my target would still be distant. Damn that hamster bastard, daring to scam me into a sponsor contract and selling me off.’

Thinking about it made him angry again. 12 days ago, Ark had gone to find Tori to settle the first amount of metal parts he gathered. At that time Ark’s bag was full of the metal parts from the bonus of defeated the Debris. Moreover, Ark had been promoted to an Attacker so he was cheerful.

‘If this continues then I will get 200 gold quickly!’ was what he thought.....

“This is 60 kg? It is 2 silver per kilogram so that is 7 gold in total.”

Tori muttered as he measured the metal parts on a scale.

“Eh? 7 gold?”

Was this the sound of bricks breaking his back? The metal parts he scavenged from the Nakuma for 3 days were only worth 7 gold? That meant he made 2 gold and 30 silver every day. Then wasn’t the bonus just 23 silver?

“N-no way! The parts I went through all that trouble to gather.....”

“What? Do you think I’m cheating you?”

Tori said as he turned his head.

“Then look for yourself! This is the present price for scrap metal calculated by the federal government. Look! Look at it! Do you see? It is recorded that the price is 2 silver per kilogram! Ah really! What are you thinking? Do you think I’m trying to cheat you of the price?”

Tori held out a document stamped with the federation’s official mark that had different quotes on it. Like Tori said, the market price was 2 silver per kilogram.

‘If that is the market price then I can’t say anything.....’

Ark wasn’t gathering scrap metal in order to earn pocket money. Tori would only teach Ark the hacking skill if he gathered scrap metal worth 10 gold at least 20 times. It meant he needed to gather 200 gold worth of scrap metal to learn hacking. If he only gathered 7 gold in 3 days then it would take more than a month to earn 200 gold. It wouldn’t be possible if he earned the bonus every time. If he only received the base salary of the Attackers then it would take 4 months.

‘This is ridiculous!’

Ark was filled with adrenaline when he calculated the result. But he couldn’t do anything since it was the formal market price. The moment Ark was going to give up!

“Wait a minute!”

The man appeared like the wind.....

“Hey Tori, I’ve been watching and you really are terrible!”

The guy who ran forward was the Scavenger Heksu. Tori

flinched and shouted angrily as he saw Heksu.

“What, what the? What do you mean? Why are you interrupting my business deal?”

“Business? You’re playing around. Isn’t this a scam? I can’t allow you to do that to Ark. Ark saved my life. I can’t just let my saviour be cheated in front of me!”

“S-scam?”

“Yes, Ark. You’re still inexperienced so you don’t know but not all the metal obtained from the Nakuma is the same. Some are plain metal and some are special. The price will vary depending on the type of metal. It is natural. Is gold and copper the same price? The Silver Hand settles the spoils depending on the price. Your bag is limited so you were given some of the expensive metal. Yet the hamster indicated that it was just plain scrap metal.”

Heksu raised his arm and classified the metal parts Ark took out.

“Now, look here. This is a silver alloy worth 20 silver per kilogram. And this one is 50 silver per kilogram. This is a rare metal alloy and is 1 gold per kilogram.”

Heksu calculated again and the price ended up as 25 gold!

‘That cheating hamster bastard!’

Ark glared at Tori. Then Tori pouted as he looked into the distance and said.

“What? Why are you looking at me like that? Do you think I deceived you on purpose? I didn’t know either. How could it be? I’m getting old and forgetful that I even forget to eat some days.”

Tori pretended ignorance. Ark realized why Tori asked him to pay in metal parts instead of money. When he first signed the contract, he thought 200 gold wouldn't be that much because it was paid in instalments. Yet the hamster was trying to cheat him to get more money. He forgot for a while but this was the hamster he wanted to drive a bullet into. But that was for after he learnt the hacking skill.

‘Anyway, I have to be careful not to be exploited by this hamster.’

So Ark always brought Heksu when disposing of metal parts. It wasn't easy since Heksu was an NPC but Ark had saved his life. Furthermore, Heksu was still actively trying to get Ark to become his successor.

“How is it? You can acquire abundant knowledge if you become a Scavenger.”

He tried to incite Ark with that but.....

Ark showed concentration equivalent for students preparing for the law bar exam if it came to money!

‘I can receive Heksu's help while I'm a part of the Silver Hand but that has its limitations. Metal is a basic component of Galaxian. Other merchant NPCs might try to trick me like Tori so I should learn metal classification.’

Therefore Ark carefully watched the way Heksu classified the metals. If he did that then he would learn the knowledge. First it was possible to roughly classify the metal through colour and texture. Aside from colour and texture, there was also sound. Some

metals made a ringing sound when tapped by a hammer. Ark absorbed that information into his head. The last time he was in the store, he tried to classify the metal by himself. He got roughly 70% correct. He then repeated it until the accuracy reached 100%!

-A new skill (Common Occupation ☆☆) has been learnt.

Metallurgy (User, Passive): You can deeply observe the appearance of metal and determine what type it is. If you find a new lode containing metal then this skill will be very important. In addition, the probability of getting a better metal when defeating mechanical life forms will increase. If your knowledge deepens then it is possible to investigate the composition of metals and produce new alloys.

<You can perfect classify the metal composition of general metals. The probability of getting good quality metals from mechanical creatures will rise by 20%>

An unexpected skill was learnt.

‘That.....it isn’t a bad skill to avoid scams.’

He would’ve never been able to learn the skill if it wasn’t for Tori. Of course, the idea of thanking the hamster never entered his mind. Anyway, the Metallurgy skill allowed him to classify metal composition. He was soon able to classify the metal parts dropped by the Nakuma.

“Scary talent! Genius, a genius. A Scavenger.....”

Heksu once again regretted Ark's talent. However, Heksu was forced to give up on making Ark his successor. The reason was.....

Tang-! Tang-! Tang-!

The revolver shots rang across the swamp! The final resisting Nakuma collapsed. Clem clicked his tongue and turned towards Ark.

“..... Now it is the end. The chick who had difficulty is now gone.”

“Yes, you had some hard times.”

The other Attackers said with a glum expression. Ark put away his dagger and revolver and bowed.

“Yes, thank you for everything. I was able to grow up thanks to Captain-nim, Heksu-nim and the Silver Hand.”

“This child, you're making me cry.”

Clem nudged Ark's shoulder and said. The Silver Hand was a hired mercenary troop to hunt the Nakuma multiplying on Istana. They had been hunting the Nakuma round Nephalim for a fortnight now. They couldn't hunt the Nakuma using the amplifier much longer. It was time to leave for another city.

“I had wanted to continue with you but.....”

Ark also found it valuable. He was able to obtain a lot of experience from hunting with the Silver Hand. And he received quite a bit of income. However, how was different from other users. No matter how much experience and loot, he couldn't just hunt the Nakuma. No, even if it wanted to Ark had a contract with

Tori not the Silver Hand. He was presently a ‘hired staff.’

“It can’t be helped. You will do well wherever you go. But come find us at any time if you want work. You are already part of our family. If you have some difficulties then we will help you.”

Clem manipulated the Nymphe and an information window appeared.

-The GPS has been given the tracking information of the mercenary troop Silver Hand.

If you enter this GPS data then you will be able to determine the location of the Silver Hand’s truck.

“Thank you. I’ll definitely visit you sometime.”

Ark finally parted from the Silver Hand after hunting together for a fortnight. He confirmed that the Silver Hand truck moved to another city before returning to the junkyard. Ark still had work to do despite parting from the Silver Hand. He could finally learn the hacking skill after two weeks.

‘So far I’ve done it 19 times so this is the last one!’

Tori couldn’t believe it but he kept his promise. He showed Ark hacking techniques every time he bought specific amounts of gold. There were two important processes in learning hacking. One was to extract the OS of the machine parts that the Nakuma dropped to create a hacking program. Ark would then combine the sources to produce a hacking program. During the past fortnight, Ark had extracted 19 different OS sources. He had finally obtained 200 gold

worth of metal parts and was going to complete the 20th time. However, it wasn't that easy.

“Phew! Looking at this for a while will give me nausea. But now it is almost finished!”

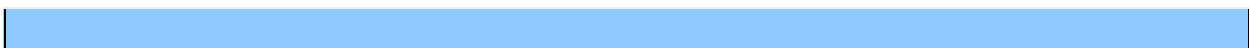
Ark glared at the monitor after returning to the junkyard.

-akqlkd# dlakdi# doqmalkdc-33458# do-342kdkcnq#.....

Wild characters were listed on the monitor. This was the OS source derived from the mechanical parts that the Nakuma dropped. In fact, Ark had felt his spirit fly away the first time he saw this screen. Making an OS program in the game didn't require professional knowledge. The complicated technology would proceed automatically. Ark thought like that. However, he was 50% correct and 50% wrong. This game certainly didn't require specialized knowledge. Instead Galaxian asked for a patient heart! The monitor had complex characters but they had no meaning. Some paragraphs just consisted of the letters A, B, C, D. The problem was that it wasn't in order. So it would be D, A, C, B. In order to produce a hacking program, he had to change the jumbled order to the right one.

‘It didn't seem like a big deal at first.....’

When Tori first taught him, he only had to fix 3 paragraphs. He only had to change the order a few times and the right answer would appear. However, every time it repeated then the number would increase until the last attempt had 30 paragraphs. He had to change the order of 30 paragraphs and test it! It was the first time he had gone through such work. But Ark was patient!



-Error!

-Error.....

It took him 10 hours! The message seemed to continue forever.

-The program operation was a success!

20 different OS have been successfully combined with the source program and uploaded to the system.

-The hacking program 'Invader Ver 1.0' has been uploaded to the Nymph.

-Special data has been uploaded to the Nymph and a new skill (Common Occupation ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆) has been learnt.

Hacking (User, Active): You have received the guidance of the hacker Tori and created your own hacking program. It will be able to connect to various electronic devices in Galaxian and unlock them. However, if you excessively use the hacking program then you might be caught by the federation and arrested for illegal hacking.

<Able to release level 1~3 electronic locks>

Mental power consumption: 50>

‘A 4 star rated skill!’

Ark’s mouth gaped open. The stars indicted the degree of difficulty in learning the skill. Things like Dagger Mastery and Close Marksmanship only had 1 star while skills like Metallurgy had 2 stars.

3 stars indicated a special technique learned from an NPC so more stars meant it was a more difficult skill to learn. 4 stars was almost the best rating! He had collected scrap iron for half a month and this was the result. His suffering was rewarded with the hacking skill.....

‘I can examine it immediately!’

Ark took out the memory chip. It was the memory chip he found in the toy received from the baby octopuses. He had gone through all this trouble to unlock the data. Ark looked half anxious and half expectant as he connected the toy to the Nymphe. The automatic lock message appeared like before.

-This memory chip is protected with a security device.

Enter the security code or use Invaders to hack and release the lock.

Attempt to hack? Y/N

“Okay, start!”

TO BE CONTINUED